

Children's perspectives on child well-being: A pathway to sustainable futures

by

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I declare that this mini dissertation is my own original work. All secondary material used has been carefully acknowledged and referenced according to the university requirements.

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ABSTRACT

CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD WELL-BEING: A PATHWAY TO SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

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Many decisions that are related to children's well-being are made based on social policies and on the conceptions of adults. However, adult conceptions of child well-being may not be relevant to children. Therefore, children's views on matters that affect them can provide meaningful insight in order to develop social work interventions that will contribute to the well-being of children. It is through children's active participation in decision making regarding their well-being that policies and services become child responsive, which leads to positive lifelong outcomes for the children.

The goal of the study was to explore children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context. The study adopted an exploratory qualitative research approach and utilised an instrumental case study design. Purposive and snowball sampling were used to recruit ten participants for the study. Data was collected by means of semi-structured one-on-one interviews which made use of an interview schedule and visual cards.

The findings from the study show that children are responsible beings who know exactly what well-being means to them. However, children do not fully participate in matters that concern their well-being and everyday lives. In instances where they are consulted, their opinions are not taken seriously or considered in the final decision-making process. The study concludes that children's agency must be recognised, and their views taken into consideration in order to develop pathways for sustainable futures.

Recommendations include considering the different meanings that children attach to their well-being in developing responsive intervention programmes that promote and enhance child well-being. Furthermore, the study recommends the development of protective factors, mitigating risk factors of child well-being, and recognising children's agency by consulting children and considering their opinions when making decisions that affect their well-being.

Key words

Child

Child well-being

Subjective child well-being

Child participation

Sustainable development

Sustainable futures

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Child well-being is a process of creating holistic, positive outcomes in the physical, mental, social, and material domains, which overshadows the negative intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal, and cultural experiences of a given child (Minkinen, 2013:4; Newland, Giger, Lawler, Roh, Brockevelde & Schwenle, 2019:395). A child's well-being involves their physical, emotional, cognitive, social, spiritual, and environmental welfare. Well-being also has a significant influence on a child's development and their future (Ben-Arieh, Casas, Frønes & Korbin, 2014:3; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355). Well-being is a personal construct which includes subjective indicators (such as one's perception of happiness, quality of life, and overall satisfaction) and objective indicators (such as health status, resources for education, and household income) (Statham & Chase, 2010:2). The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was created to enhance the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of the sustainable development of all people, including children (United Nations, 2015:3). While South Africa has made significant progress in terms of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for children, some children are still disadvantaged (South African Human Rights Commission & United Nations Children's Fund, 2016:3). Other issues, such as broken families, HIV/AIDS, violent crimes, exploitation, malfunctioning communities, and climate change, also have a significant effect on children (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:1; Peeters, 2012:287).

The developmental approach to social work in South Africa focuses on promoting social change and the "well-being of individuals, families, groups, and communities in their social context" (Patel, 2015:127). Thus, social workers understand that upholding child well-being functions as a preventative measure against negative changes in well-being in the future, which can have lasting implications for children. However, in order to improve child well-being, the voice of the child needs to be heard. It is through children's active participation that policies and services become child responsive and lead to positive lifelong outcomes (Save the Children South Africa, 2018:10).

Since well-being is a personal construct, children are best positioned to determine their own perspectives of well-being (Fattore & Mason, 2017:267). However, children's perspectives are still invisible because of policies and the need for protection, which

overshadows their well-being (I'Anson, 2013:106). Although studies have been conducted on child well-being, research on children's own perspectives on child well-being is limited (Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, 2019:464), especially in South Africa. Thus, this study focused on how South African children conceptualise and perceive their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future.

The key concepts relevant to this study are:

Child: The Children's Act 25 of 2005 defines a child as "a person under the age of 18 years". In the context of this study, the term "child" will refer to children between the ages of eight and twelve years – in other words, in the developmental stage of middle childhood (Louw, Louw & Kail, 2014:8).

Child well-being: Child well-being is a holistic concept that involves the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, spiritual, and environmental well-being of children and is characterised by an absence of psychiatric or psychological problems (Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355). Well-being usually refers to children's evaluations of various domains of their life in terms of satisfaction, happiness, fears, and apprehensions in the moment (Casas & Frønes, 2019: 4).

Sustainable development: Sustainable development is based on the concept of meeting socio-economic development in line with ecological constraints, redistribution of resources to ensure the quality of life for all and the possibility of long-term usage of resources to ensure the necessary quality of life for future generations (Klarin, 2018:68). Sustainable development can thus be achieved through the integration and acknowledgement of economic, environmental, and social concerns throughout the decision-making process (Emas, 2015:2). Thus, development done in a sustainable manner leads to sustainable futures.

Sustainable futures: The term "sustainable futures" means a future that is characterised by human dignity, social inclusion, and environmental protection (United Nations Global Monitoring Report, 2016:4). In this study, sustainable futures are defined as futures for children that are free from social ills such as poverty, inequality, lack of basic services, and crime, which can be achieved if children's perspectives on child well-being are identified and incorporated into development and intervention plans.

Child participation: Child participation implies that all children enjoy the right to be heard, to communicate their own views, and to have a say in matters that affect them (Bala 2018:10). It is an active inclusion of children in the decisions, processes, programmes, and policies that affect their lives, and is a fundamental right of all children (SCSA, 2018:09). In this study, child participation means listening to children's views on matters that concern them, and considering their views when adults make decisions on policies and services that aim to improve child well-being.

1.2 Theoretical framework

Theory is important in social work as it provides the basis on which to explain human behaviour, development, and social functioning (Teater, 2015:3). Since social workers intervene at the point where individuals meet their environments, it is necessary to understand the interactions between child well-being and the environment. The ecological systems theory was identified and adopted as a suitable theoretical framework for the study. The ecological systems theory views the child as embedded in a series of complex and interactive systems (Louw et al., 2014:29). The ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3). Child development is theorised as being based on four concentric circles of environmental influence, with time as a significant factor, which acknowledges both individual and historical changes over time (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011:466).

Child development and child well-being are intertwined with societal conditions. In other words, there is a reciprocal relationship between children and the environment. The well-being of the child should therefore be understood in light of all the various systems that the child interacts with either directly or indirectly. This reciprocity and interdependence of systems made the ecological systems theory relevant for the study since children are affected by what goes on in their different environments.

1.3 Rationale and problem statement

The rationale of the study is that all children, although a vulnerable group, have the potential to grow within their physical and social environment (Buck, Kevin Summers, Smith, & Harwell, 2018:1252), and that, to improve child well-being, the voice of the child must be heard. Children's physical, mental, social, cognitive, spiritual, material, and environmental well-being have a significant influence on their lives and their futures (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:1; Nahkur & Kutsar, 2019:355; Newland et al.,

2019:395; Minkkinen, 2013:4). Children's well-being is a critical aspect in their ability to master developmental tasks and helps them to adjust to and appropriately interact with their environment (Ayala-Nunes, Jimenez, Jesus, Nunes & Hidalgo, 2018:812; Peeters, 2012:290).

Although South Africa has made notable progress with the implementation of the SDGs that are intended to promote the well-being of all people, factors such as social and economic inequality hamper progress, and a large number of children are still exposed to adverse circumstances (Lombard, 2015:484; SAHRC & UNICEF, 2016:5). Many children are still severely affected by societal problems such as poverty, violence, family disintegration, mental health problems, substance use, adverse childhood experiences and climate change (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:885; Patel, 2015:291-292; Naicker et al., 2017:2; Republic of South Africa, 2012:18-22; Richter & Dawes, 2008:86; Richter et al., 2012:3). Social workers in South Africa work with large numbers of children whose lives are affected by these social problems (Newland et al., 2019:397).

Social workers using a developmental approach can play an important role in advocating for sustainable development and the well-being of children (Hawkins, 2010:69; Lombard & Viviers, 2014:83; Patel, 2015:127). Ayala-Nunes et al. (2018:813) emphasise the importance of promoting the well-being of children. They note that

promoting and investing on the well-being and positive development of children and youth—especially for those growing up in adverse environments—is being increasingly viewed as a political priority and a means to break the cycle of disadvantage and to enhance social cohesion as well as to increase productivity in the economy and in society at large.

Many decisions related to children's well-being are based on social policies and on the conceptions of adults. However, adult conceptions about child well-being may not be relevant to children (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:10; Buck et al., 2018:1254). In addition, views on child well-being are socially and culturally constructed and may vary in different contexts (Mashford-Scott, Church, & Tayler, 2012:235). The personal and subjective nature of well-being and the knowledge that children have of their lives put

them in the best position to explain what well-being means to them (Fattore & Mason, 2017:276-277; Minkkinen, 2013:4).

The participation of children in matters affecting them, as described in Article 10 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005, can provide meaningful information that can be used by social workers to develop interventions that will contribute to the well-being of children, both in the short-term and the future. The aim of this study was thus to explore the perspectives of children in middle childhood on child well-being within a South African context.

The study was guided by the following research question:

- What are children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures within the South African context?

Supplementary questions for the research included the following:

- How do South African children define their own well-being?
- What factors influence child well-being?
- How do social workers in South Africa promote child well-being?
- How can children's agency be promoted for sustainable futures?

1.4 Goal and objectives of the study

The goal and objectives of the study were as follows:

1.4.1 Research goal

The goal of the study was to explore children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context.

1.4.2 Research objectives

- To conceptualise child well-being and participation within the framework of ecological systems theory and sustainability.
- To explore children's understanding of child well-being.
- To explore children's views on social factors that affect their current and future well-being.
- To explore children's views on economic factors that affect their current and future well-being.

- To explore children's views on environmental factors that affect their current and future well-being.
- To describe the children's suggestions for enhancing child participation in matters that influence their well-being.

1.5 Research methodology

This section highlights the research methodology employed in this study. More details will be provided in Chapter Three. The study used a qualitative research approach in order to explore the perspectives of children on their own well-being since it uses verbal descriptions to portray the phenomenon being studied (Fouché & Delpont, 2011:64; Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:59). Interpretivism was the research paradigm which was most suitable for this study. This is because interpretivism views reality as a social construct that can be understood by studying people in their social settings (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:67). It was important that the researcher adopted the viewpoint that children can interpret events and provide multiple perspectives on well-being. Qualitative research was useful in assisting the researcher to understand rather than explain child well-being. Furthermore, data collection relied on the words of participants rather than on numerical figures. The study had an exploratory and descriptive purpose. The researcher explored a topic on which limited research has been conducted in the South African context, and then provided a qualitative description of the phenomenon (Fouché & De Vos, 2011b:95-96; Neuman, 2014:38).

The study used an instrumental case study research design to explore how children describe their well-being, as it allows participants to freely share their perspectives and thoughts. There were ten participants in the study, each between the ages of nine and twelve years. All the participants fell in the middle childhood category. Purposive and snowball sampling methods were used to select the child participants for the study. Data was collected by means of semi-structured interviews with open ended questions which gave the researcher the flexibility to explore information in more detail. The collected data was analysed thematically according to Clarke, Braun and Hayfield (2015:230) and Nowell, Norries, White and Moules (2017:4).

1.6 Research chapter outline

The research report is divided into five chapters. Chapter one gives a general introduction to the study. It briefly conceptualises child well-being, highlights the theoretical framework, problem statement and rationale, the goal and objectives of the study, and a summary of the research methodology. Chapter two provides a review of some of the literature on child well-being and the importance thereof, as well as a discussion of the factors that can influence children's well-being. The chapter also presents a detailed discussion of the theoretical framework, child participation, the role of developmental social workers and the characteristics of middle childhood. Chapter three discusses the research methodology of the study and the ethical considerations that were relevant to the study. Chapter four presents the empirical study and findings of the study. Chapter five presents the study's key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Well-being is a complex phenomenon that can be evaluated by measuring a wide range of subjective and objective structures (Forgeard, Jayawickreme, Kern & Seligman 2011:79). It is a concept that has been thoroughly researched from the perspectives of adults, while neglecting the voices of children. The concept of well-being has become prevalent in academic and policy dialogues in recent years, and it is becoming progressively more popular as a consolidated idea in different fields of social policy, international development, and, recently, in childhood development (Camfield, Streuli & Woodmead 2010:1). The objective approach to well-being originated from Amartya Sen's work in welfare economics and how to measure poverty and inequalities (Western & Tomaszewski 2016:2). In subjective well-being studies, children report on their level of life satisfaction and happiness in various life domains, such as time use, virtual world, social relationships, and political voice, among others (Casas & Fronas, 2019:4; McAuley, McKeown & Merriman, 2012:451; Nadan & Tzadok, 2019; Rees & Main, 2015:12). Child well-being is a personal construct. Hence, the focus in this study was on how South African children conceptualise and perceive their own social, physical, economic, spiritual, environmental, and emotional well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures.

The chapter starts with a discussion on the concept, dimensions, the indicators, and factors that affect child well-being, as well as the policy and legislative frameworks that promote child well-being. In the following sections, the discussion focuses on child well-being in the South African context, the role of social work, and child participation and agency in informing a pathway for sustainable futures. The last sections focus on ecological systems theory, which is the theoretical framework for the study and the characteristics of middle childhood. The chapter ends with a summary.

2.2 Conceptualising child well-being

The concept of well-being encompasses the various positive ways that people evaluate and experience their lives. As a multidimensional phenomenon, well-being is a process of holistic positive outcomes in the physical, mental, social, and material domains, which outweigh negative intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal, and cultural experiences (Minkkinen, 2013:4; Newland et al., 2019:395). The physical well-being

of the child relates to adequate functioning and the absence of illness, while mental well-being entails the emotional and cognitive well-being of the child. Social well-being indicates favourable social circumstances and positive relationships between the child and their significant others (Minkkinen, 2013:5). These relationships form the foundation of the social interactions and behaviours of the child (Buck et al., 2018:1254), which are especially important for social work intervention.

Even though well-being is a growing area of research, the question of how it should be defined remains unanswered (Dodge, Daly, Huyton & Sanders 2012:222). Ayala-Nunes et al. (2018:811) add that, despite its relevance in social, political, and economic fields, child well-being remains a challenging concept to define and measure. This could be due to its multidimensional nature (Ryan & Deci, 2001 in Jaana; 2013:548), which makes it difficult to capture in a brief theory. Jaana (2013:549) states that well-being can only be understood by taking its multidimensional nature into account. Casas and Fronès (2019:1;4) assert that understanding child well-being entails relating the complex perspective of well-being to the characteristics of contemporary childhood. The concept of well-being, as it relates to children, usually refers to children's evaluations of various domains of their lives in terms of satisfaction, happiness, fears, and apprehensions in the present. Fattore and Mason (2017:276) proclaim that one's sense of well-being is highly personal, and individuals articulate their own experience of what well-being is and what gives them a sense of well-being. This is referred to as subjective well-being. As such, subjective well-being depends on the individual's own views of the self (Minkkinen, 2013:4), and can be achieved when there is a balance between an individual's resources and the challenges they face (Dodge et al., 2012:230). Well-being is therefore understood as the quality of people's lives, and it is a dynamic state that is enhanced when people can achieve their personal and social goals (Statham & Chase, 2010:2).

Michaux (2010:15) states that children's well-being and quality of health must be well established in their early years for them to grow up as adults that will contribute positively to society. It is therefore important to hear children's views on what they regard as necessary for their well-being, and to improve the care and services that they are currently receiving for their development. Recently, child studies have shifted from being adult-informed to engaging children in matters that concern them. This shift

has promoted the production of child-informed studies of children's subjective well-being (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:13; Casas & Frønes 2019:10). Children's well-being is thus based on subjective and objective categories, which are discussed in the following sections. Both objective and subjective well-being needs must be met for an individual to be truly healthy in all spheres of life (Naidoo & Muthukrishna, 2016:8).

2.3 Objective indicators of well-being

The objective approach defines well-being in terms of quality-of-life indicators, which include income, food, housing, and social factors such as education, academic performance, health, political voice, and social networks (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016:2). These indicators are measurable (Casas & Frønes, 2019:3; Statham & Chase, 2010:5) and aid our understanding of whether children's needs are met and if services are sufficiently provided. UNICEF (2021:6) points out that improved objective well-being and the absence of material deprivation may lead to higher life satisfaction. Objective indicators of child well-being are divided into three categories: social, economic, and environmental indicators of child well-being.

2.3.1 Social indicators of well-being

Social well-being can be defined as one's social relationships, conditions, and functioning in their social community. It is based on the way in which one perceives the quality of their relationships with other people in their social networks, neighbourhoods, and communities (Keyes & Shapiro, 2004 in Dunaeva 2018:568). The right to participate fully in family, cultural, and social life is one of the main driving principles of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), but some poor or disadvantaged children are robbed of the right to participate in activities like arts and sports due to lack of private and public resources (Müderrişoğlu, Semerci, Çakar, Karatay & Akkan, 2013:10).

Social indicators of well-being are essential in the study of child well-being as they provide information on the state of children, as well as changes to children's well-being over time. This then allows policy makers and other stakeholders to set goals that are targeted at improving well-being in areas of need (Ben-Arieh & Frønes, 2011 in Cheevers & O'Connell, 2012:214). Dunaeva (2018:566) says that social well-being is connected to one's relations with others, and their feelings of security in the environment in which they live. This means that the safety of children in their

respective social environments and supportive relationships are important for their well-being. Current research asserts that healthy family relationships and interactions among family members are strongly and positively linked to individual well-being (Botha & Booysen, 2013:3). Rahdarzadeh and Adibisedeh (2016:194) posit that there is a strong relationship between social well-being and social support, where an increase in one causes an increase in the other. For example, a strong social support network of family, friends, and teachers may buffer abused children from poor social outcomes, thereby improving their social functioning.

2.3.2 Economic indicators of well-being

Economic indicators refer to adequate nutrition, housing, and other material items that usually contribute to the general standard of living of the society and culture in which the child is immersed (Jaana, 2013:5). Bradshaw, Hoelscher and Richardson (2006:10) mention that the conditions of a child's home and neighbourhood impact their well-being and development significantly. The child's economic situation influences their well-being and well-becoming in many ways and to varying degrees. Therefore, many researchers focus on the economic impacts felt by children and their well-being. Areas that could be impacted by economic factors include investments made by parents, the child's development, the socio-economic status of parents, the child's health, the success of an adult, family background, inter-generational transmission, and early life circumstances (Conti & Heckman, 2012:11). It can be noted that a lack of sufficient income negatively impacts children's rights to nutrition, education, and health care services.

2.3.3 Environmental indicators of child well-being

Recently, there has been a notable shift in studies focusing on child well-being. This shift is characterised by the consideration given to the environment that children spend most of their time in (Adams, Savahl, Florence & Jackson, 2019:547; Buck et al., 2018:1263). Local environments, especially natural environments, can have significant effects on children's well-being. Poverty and environmental conditions such as overcrowding, poor sanitation and hygiene are strongly associated with increased instances of major childhood diseases and malnutrition (UNICEF, 2012:5). Environmental conditions, such as pollution from industrial development, have caused some serious health problems that are difficult to deal with today (Irina & Yana,

2016:182). Additionally, global issues, such as climate change, continue to change the earth's climate system in ways that threaten children's physical and mental well-being (Currie & Deschenes, 2016:3). The risks are greater for children living in developing countries with weak infrastructure. Therefore, the well-being of children depends on the status of the environment they live in. Examining environmental indicators of child well-being is extremely important, in that increasing natural disasters affect communities, families, and children. Alston (2015:357) mentions that people that are often affected by disasters are those that are already struggling to make a living or have unmet socio-economic rights, such as access to health care, adequate living conditions, and decent income.

Although objective measures of child well-being are particularly important, they do not consider human perspectives. In light of this, there has been increasing recognition that objective measures of well-being are inadequate for the development of policy. Therefore, subjective indicators based on individuals' self-reports of aspects of life are also required (Statham & Chase, 2010:5). Consensus on this matter has led to the inclusion of subjective aspects of well-being in recent studies, which has also informed this study.

2.4 Subjective indicators of well-being

Current trends in the international literature point to the importance of subjective perceptions of well-being. They also play a key role in developing indicator systems of well-being (Strózik, Strózik & Szwarc, 2015:1). In the same regard, Casas and Fronès (2019:2) say that the ever-changing circumstances of a childhood rooted in the connection between children's development and changing societies emphasise the significance of the opinions and perceptions of children as their lives unfold in a dynamic world. This research focus is characterised by its inclination to move away from an absolute focus on indicators like poverty or deprivation. Instead, it moves towards indicators involving multiple components of child well-being (Conti & Heckman, 2012:5). Well-being is seen as a subjective construct which involves judgements of life satisfaction and evaluation of feelings (Rigby, Hagell & Starbuck, 2018:01). However, Casas and Fronès (2019:05) assert that subjective well-being is a multidimensional concept consisting of different components. The components of subjective well-being, as identified by the Children's World project in Rees and Main (2015:33), include cognitive, affective, and psychological well-being. These differ from

those used in social work research, which are social well-being, economic stability, and environmental well-being (Coompton & Hoffman, 2013:51; Fattore & Mason, 2017:276; Miller, Hayward & Shaw, 2012:23). The differences indicated above support the notion of the multidimensional nature of subjective well-being.

Unlike objective measures that rely on facts, subjective well-being relies on the individual's assessment of how life is going, and how the individual rates their feelings (Wood & Selwyn, 2017:3). Western and Tomaszewski (2016:2) state that the subjective approach to well-being is centred on individuals' assessments of their lives. It is especially focused on the individual's life satisfaction, which includes a cognitive evaluation of happiness and unhappiness. This study, therefore, embraces the shift from focusing solely on objective measures to include children's views on their subjective well-being.

The discussion of the objective and subjective indicators of child well-being shows that child well-being is influenced by the inter-relatedness of systems in broader society that influence families and children. Schweiger and Graf (2015:4,5) point out that, when theorising child well-being, it is important to recognise and take into consideration a variety of layers and complex social groupings and norms which influence the individual. It is therefore necessary to consider the several factors that influence child well-being. Although children have agency, they are also in need of care and protection, and are affected by what goes on in the different social, economic, and environmental systems of which they are a part.

2.5 Factors that affect child well-being

This section discusses the environmental and socio-economic factors that affect child well-being. These factors relate to objective indicators which aim to counteract the negative impacts thereof on child well-being.

2.5.1 Environmental factors that affect child well-being

Children's well-being is tied to two important components: first, the well-being of their general environment, and second, the well-being of their caregivers (World Vision, 2013:10). Community environments that are characterised by violence threaten children's safety and sense of belonging (Buck et al, 2018:1263). Research has shown that children's lack of safety in their communities restricts their exploration of the environment and limits spaces for playing and peer interactions, which are

essential for their well-being (Adams et al., 2019:555). Additionally, the above authors note that children living in communities that are exposed to pollution and inadequate access to water and sanitation are at risk of contracting water- and airborne diseases. South African Child Gauge (2019:164) also mention that South African children are exposed to air pollution from both solid and liquid fuels, as well as pollutants from industries, which increase children's risk of contracting diseases such as asthma.

The natural environment is important for the promotion of child well-being, as it is where most caregivers in developing countries, like South Africa, derive their livelihoods (World Vision, 2013:5). Children who grow up in healthy environments are better equipped to thrive, even when faced with disease, disaster, or crises (SACG, 2020: 46). According to Hawkins (2010:71), the consequences of failing to recognise the ecological crises with which we are faced and to respond to them accordingly will destroy the very environment that sustains human life. Consequently, degraded environments can become the root causes of poverty, which directly affect children's well-being. It was noted that the world's most poor, vulnerable, and oppressed people often live in the most degraded environments, and they have no control over resources (Hawkins 2010:68). As a result, children that are raised in disadvantaged environments are not equipped with the same experiences, skills, and advantages that children from more privileged communities have, and they usually lag behind throughout their lifetimes as a result of this lack of adequate resources that are necessary for development (Conti & Heckman, 2012:3). Consequently, disadvantaged children continue to be trapped by the deprivations they are confronted with. Therefore, McKinnon (2008:258) strongly recommends that, if social work is to maintain its relevance, it must incorporate an understanding of the ecological environment, as a result of its effect on humanity.

2.5.2 Socio-economic factors that affect child well-being

Family relationships are important for a child's development and well-being, as they form the foundation for interactions that the child has with others (Botha & Booyesen, 2013:1; Louw & Louw, 2014:39). Newlands et al. (2019:397) maintain a similar view as they regard the family as the most influential system that impacts children's developmental outcomes and the ways in which children routinely interact with others and participate in daily life activities. Factors such as culture, ethnicity, and socio-economic status can have a significant impact on the child's development, since these

factors are dependent upon parents' socio-economic status (Newlands et al., 2019: 398). This means that the family's socio-economic status can affect children's well-being either positively or negatively. Socio-economic factors that affect child well-being are further divided into risk and protective factors.

2.5.2.1 Risk factors that affect child well-being

Many studies have shown that being born into a poor family significantly affects all spheres of the child's life, and that they have fewer opportunities to develop their capacities as compared to children that are raised in more prosperous families (Müderrisoğlu et al., 2013:22). Chaudry and Wimer (2016:23) point out that poverty and low income are causally related to poor child development. Therefore, poverty is a risk factor because it compromises children's positive development. Children who are exposed to poverty, exploitation, forced migration, and land degradation are affected physically, mentally, and spiritually as their well-being is negatively impacted by the circumstances around them (Boyden & Mann, 2005:3).

Another contributing factor to poor child development and well-being is dysfunctional families, wherein children experience conflict, violence, and neglect. Bullied children are also at risk of developing mental health and emotional problems (Moore & Ramirez, 2016:33). Akram, Anjum and Akram (2015:177) confirm that if a child lives in an unstable environment, these circumstances affect their happiness and ability to adjust. Similarly, children who have lost a parent or guardian are the most vulnerable, because they suffer the loss of someone who protects them, makes decisions on their behalf, and, most importantly, supports them as they develop into adults (Akram et al., 2015:4).

The highlighted factors present risks for children's further development. They also affect their social performance and proficiencies in various spheres of life (Barnova & Gabrhelova, 2017:7). Therefore, growing up in poor households is likely to compromise children's living conditions and access to services, resulting in various forms of deprivation and social exclusion that may lead to poverty traps which are difficult to escape (South African Child Gauge, 2020:37). This resultantly hinders children's pathways to sustainable futures. Protective factors of child well-being, as will be discussed in the next section, have the potential to lessen the negative effects of undesirable life circumstances (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:811). Investing in

children's abilities to reduce risks means investing in risk reduction for future generations (Manyena, Fordham & Collins, 2008:312).

2.5.2.2 Protective factors of child well-being

Protective factors are those that positively affect children's well-being. It includes conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities and the larger society that mitigate risk and promote the healthy development and well-being of children and families (Children's Bureau, 2020:1). These factors help ensure that children function well at home, school, and in the community. Barnova and Tamasova (2018:54) share this same sentiment, saying that protective factors promote mental health and positive development in the face of risk factors. Thus, protective factors increase the likelihood of seeing outcomes that are better than expected (Greene & Greene, 2009:1013).

According to Botha and Booyesen (2013:2), well-functioning families are vital in ensuring optimal individual performance and productivity, which serve to improve individual well-being. The health of parents is essential to children's well-being, as this affects the functioning of the whole family system (Newlands, 2014:1339). Therefore, positive families contribute to the positive well-being of children, as they are sources of care, support, happiness, a sense of belonging (Fattore & Mason, 2017: 279; McAuley et al, 2012:455), resilience, and better achievement at school (Louw & Louw, 2014:393).

The more protective factors a family has, the more it can mitigate risk factors. Friendships and positive family contexts positively affect children's well-being as they help children develop socially acceptable behaviours (Rees & Main, 2015:65). For this reason, children need supportive and safe environments that can function as protective factors in the face of adversity (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche & Pfefferbaum, 2008:145). Such environments help children overcome adverse situations, as they actively seek and use help from the social relationships at their disposal (Barnova & Tamasova, 2018:51). Schools can also provide safe spaces and act as protective factors for children experiencing violence and maltreatment at home by engaging them in activities and programmes that make them feel safer (Moore & Ramirez, 2016:52). Therefore, families, communities, and safe and productive environments are generally essential for children to develop and feel good about their lives.

Apart from the socio-economic factors, legislative frameworks also promote child well-being. Research has shown that the subjective well-being of children was found to be higher in countries that have policies that promote aspects such as pre-school education, family services, family benefits, and paid parental leave (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814). Therefore, the various international, national, and regional policies and legislation that seek to promote child well-being will be discussed in the following section.

2.6 Legislative frameworks that promote child well-being

The various international, national, and regional policies and legislation discussed in this section seek to protect and promote child well-being, and to eradicate child poverty in all its forms and dimensions.

2.6.1 International frameworks

The UNCRC (1989) commits to promoting and ensuring the well-being of children internationally. The convention provides a policy framework for the realisation of the social, political, economic, and cultural rights of all children (UNCRC, 1989). It is based on four principles: non-discrimination, the best interest of the child, the right to life, and the right to expression and participation as respectively specified in articles 2, 3, 6 and 12 of the UNCRC (1989).

Furthermore, child well-being is a key element of the *2030 Agenda*, which illustrates a framework for development by addressing poverty and inequality. This is done by means of integrating social and economic development with environmental protection (United Nations, 2015). The *2030 Agenda's* call to leave no one behind envisages a world that prioritises the most vulnerable and marginalised people, including children.

2.6.2 Regional frameworks

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was adopted by the African Union (AU) in 1990 to ensure the well-being of children in Africa and to complement the UNCRC. The ACRWC is an important instrument in ensuring that African children receive the kind of care that will promote their emotional, physical, mental, and moral well-being (Hansungule & Boezaart, 2017:45). Article 4 of the ACRWC emphasises that, when making decisions that affect children, the child's best interests are of the utmost importance (AU, 1990).

Another regional mandate that promotes child well-being is Agenda 2063: the Africa We Want (Agenda 2063). Aspiration 6 of *Agenda 2063* emphasises people-driven development in which the potential of all people, including children, should be actively pursued by all citizens (AU, 2015:7). *Agenda 2063* also prioritises the well-being of children as it vows that “no child, woman or man will be left behind”. The *Agenda 2063* aims to promote and protect the rights of the most vulnerable populations, which include children (AU, 2015:7).

2.6.3 Local frameworks

South Africa ratified the UNCRC in 1995, and the ACRWC in 2000. Their principles and relevant policies were then incorporated into South African legislation. In addition, South Africa is signatory to the *2030 Agenda* and *Agenda 2063*. The Constitution of South Africa (RSA, 1996) is the supreme law which lays a legislative framework for the promotion of human rights and human dignity, with Section 28(1)(c) of the constitution articulating the rights of the child to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care, and social services. Given that children are vulnerable and lack maturity, their rights are formulated in a manner that would cause the state to make a greater effort to safeguard the rights of children (SACG, 2020:39).

The Children’s Act 38 of 2005 makes provision for the care and protection of children against abuse, with Section 9 emphasising that the best interest of the child must be considered in all decisions. The Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 upholds the rights of children involved in crime. Other legislation, such as the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998, Chapter 3 of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act 32 of 2007, and Chapter 8 of the Prevention and Combating of Trafficking in Persons Act 27 of 2013, directly relate to the protection of children from all forms of abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and domestic violence. They also set out the legal procedures to be taken in the event of such cases. In addition, South Africa launched the National Development Plan in 2012, which has a central goal of eliminating poverty and reducing inequality to ensure a better future for all South Africans (NDP, 2012:1, 24). Its Chapter 7 focuses on social protection while one of its objectives is that “all children should enjoy services and benefits aimed at facilitating access to nutrition, health care, education, social care and safety” (NDP, 2012:72).

SACG (2020:9) says that children are the future of any society, and the success of each country depends on the way children are raised and the ways in which their growth and development are nurtured. It is therefore important to also look at how the enacted policies and legislation are helping to promote child well-being in South Africa. The next sub-heading will focus on the status of children in the country.

2.7 Child well-being in the South African context

When exploring child well-being in South Africa, it is important to consider the socio-economic historical background of Apartheid, which was the political ideology that governed South African society for many years (Savahl, Casas & Adams, 2017: 473). The former Apartheid government, with its racially discriminatory policies and structural inequalities, left in its wake a country with millions of children and their families living in abject poverty (September 2008:143). Existing social and economic inequalities hamper the implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Lombard, 2015:484), and they tend to directly impact adults and children's exercise of agency and their sense of participation in society (Bray & Moses, 2011:7). Children are thus extremely vulnerable, since South Africa's socio-economic profile demonstrates an inability to deal with the problems affecting children (Van Breda & Theron, 2018:237). Many children, the majority of whom are black, live in poor households in rural areas and informal settlements with high levels of overcrowding and limited access to basic services (SACG, 2020:38). Overcrowding affects child well-being in that it results in health problems, lack of privacy, and increased risks of sexual abuse (Hall, 2019:250). Most of these children live in households without access to adequate water and sanitation. Their access to healthcare is also compromised, as some children must travel long distances to reach healthcare facilities.

Even though the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa (RSA, 1996) makes provision for access to clean water and sanitation, there are still a significant number of children with little or no access to proper sanitation. About 4.2 million children, especially those in rural areas still use pit latrines or bucket system toilets, while nearly 340 000 children have no form of sanitation. This poses serious health risks to children, as a lack of access to decent water and sanitation is associated with the contraction of diseases such as cholera and typhoid (Hall, 2019:253). It should also be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has also compromised the health aspect of children's well-being, because it has increased malnutrition levels as households ran out of money to

buy food. According to the SACG (2020:28), 47percent of households could not afford to buy food during the hard COVID-19 lockdown, which increased child hunger to 15percent. These statistics indicate that most children in South Africa still live in conditions that negatively impact their well-being and obstruct pathways to sustainable futures for them.

The country's approach to child well-being and welfare emphasises prevention and early intervention services which are aimed at supporting children's families before the need arises for the children to enter the more formalised child protection service system (September 2008:146). The government has also implemented poverty alleviation programmes to address child poverty. For example, the child support grant has improved the circumstances of children in South Africa. Evidence shows that the recipients of the grant are greatly benefited by it in terms of education, health, and having their basic needs met (Department of Social Development [DSD], South African Social Security Agency & UNICEF, 2012). The child support grant now reaches over 10 million children every month (DSD, 2022:3). It is important to note that these policies and legislation are implemented within a rights-based approach to welfare that is, developmental social welfare. The next sub-heading examines how developmental social workers are involved in promoting child well-being.

2.8 The role of developmental social workers in promoting child well-being and sustainable futures

The goal of the developmental approach to social work in South Africa is to achieve social justice, an adequate standard of living, equal access to opportunities and services, and a commitment to meeting the needs of all South Africans - especially the most disadvantaged and vulnerable in society (Patel, 2015:58). Children are considered vulnerable because of their age and because their rights and destinies are largely controlled by adults (Viviers, 2010:12). Moreover, their dependency on parents and other duty bearers results in adults seeing children as objects of protection, and not individuals with their own opinions and views which need to be respected (Jamieson, 2011:23). Therefore, social workers are obliged to work towards eradicating inequalities and barriers that hamper children from participating in matters that affect their well-being. This is in line with the profession's values of social justice, human rights, respect for the inherent worth and dignity of people, and respect for

equality, all of which are meant to enhance the well-being of all people, including children.

The social work value of respect for the inherent worth and dignity of people forces social workers to defend each person's physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being. This means that each person and, by extension, each child should not be left to live in degraded, oppressive conditions which limit their capacity to make use of their agency. Through the ethical principle of self-determination, social workers respect and promote the right of children to self-determination and assist them in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals (National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, 2018:2). Allowing children to participate means that social workers believe in their inherent ability to self-actualise, and, as such, they must provide an atmosphere where children feel good about themselves.

Social work's commitment to human rights mandates the profession to stand up against social and economic inequality. However, Lombard and Twikirize (2014:323) say that commitment to promoting social and economic equality requires knowledge of human rights. In particular, knowledge of socio-economic rights and how they relate to social work is essential, as this forms the starting point for dealing with the causes of structural inequalities and poverty in order to promote human development. The legacy of inequalities created by the Apartheid regime compels developmental social workers to work towards empowering disadvantaged groups including children to achieve their basic needs by removing barriers to human development. In this way, equal opportunities for participation in and promotion of social justice and sustainable development may be created. In order to remove these barriers, social workers must labour towards promoting children's agency, which, according to the SACG (2020:33), entails building the capacity of historically disadvantaged and marginalised individuals, including children. Developmental social workers, therefore, have an obligation to continue advocating for children's access to their rights at individual, family, community, and policy levels of intervention (Hoefler, 2012:3).

Developmental social work is also concerned with bridging the gap between micro and macro practice (Patel, 2015:13). At the micro level, social workers are involved in meeting the needs of individual children who might be facing abuse, or whose families experience poverty and the effects thereof. At a macro level, social workers are involved in policy change or advocating for children's rights. Both micro and macro

social work practices are equally important for social justice, in that they strengthen the profession's quest for a just society (Lombard, 2019:58). Therefore, developmental social work provides a space where children can freely participate in matters that affect their well-being by challenging unjust policies and practices.

Patel (2015:128) states that ensuring human well-being through social development requires multi-sectoral collaboration, whereby individuals, the state, non-governmental organisations, and the private sector partner by contributing skills, knowledge, and resources in the provision of welfare services. From a developmental social work perspective, promoting child well-being means that everyone must contribute their knowledge, skills, and resources to meet children's needs. In the context of this study, promoting child well-being means that social workers aim to gain the participation of all stakeholders in creating safe spaces for children to practise their agency and to participate. Participation, according to Schenck, Nel and Louw (2010:91), implies the collective activity of interested and/or concerned people in achieving a jointly determined goal. This means that social workers must spearhead the discussions and advocate for children's opinions to be seriously taken into consideration by politicians, policy makers, and other stakeholders.

Developmental social work also seeks to promote the participation of vulnerable people (especially children) in matters that affect them. It also prioritises the inclusion of their views in decision-making (Patel, 2015:91). Within the context of child well-being, this theme involves consulting children in the decision-making process in matters regarding the children themselves. As articulated in Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC (1989), children have a right to participation, a right which is embedded in human rights provisions across a range of international treaties and domestic legislation (Viviers & Lombard, 2012:9). As such, children have the right to express their views on matters that affect them, which is a valuable part of the resulting decision-making processes (Bray & Moses, 2011:6). Social workers have a duty to challenge institutional barriers to participation, such as patriarchy, for example, which places children in a position where their lives are regulated by adults (Fattore & Mason, 2017:278). This is done by raising adults' awareness of the importance of child participation (Lombard & Viviers, 2014:83) as well as creating opportunities for children's views to effect change (Cassidy, 2012:66-67) by facilitating their participation in projects. The researcher is of the view that social workers ought to

challenge any practice that violates children's right to participation, as this compromises their general well-being.

Because events taking place now shape children's development and futures, it is necessary for the social work profession to continue advocating for the inclusion of children's voices, since well-being affects children's lives in the present and the future (Ben-Arieh & Shimon, 2014:101). Allowing children to assess their well-being may provide a solution to persistent social ills that affect children. The next sub-heading discusses the importance of including children's voices and agency in creating a sustainable future.

2.9 Child participation and agency in informing a pathway for a sustainable future

Research has shown that the holistic conceptualisation of subjective well-being is a vital pathway to understanding children as capable beings (Giman & Huebner, 2003 in Grass-Manos, Shimoni & Ben-Arieh, 2015:72). Therefore, developing responsive intervention programmes to enhance their well-being is vitally important (Heubner, Seligson, Valois & Suldo, 2006 in Grass-Manos et al., 2015:72). Agency has a close connection with participation, citizenship, and belonging, and is understood as the capacity of humans to make choices, to act, and to influence matters in their everyday lives (Sirkko, Kyronlampi & Puroila, 2019: 286). According to the Australian Government's Department of Education (2013:1), people have a sense of agency when they feel that they are in control of things that happen around them. Therefore, children must be given opportunities to experience agency through participation. Child participation implies that all children should enjoy the right to be heard, to communicate their views, and to impact judgments that affect them (Bala 2018:10). Save the Children South Africa (2018:09) also defines child participation as an active inclusion of children in the decisions, processes, programmes, and policies that affect their lives. According to this framework, this is a fundamental right of children. However, children's participation is often seen as foreign, superficial, and alien in most African countries, as the general understanding is that children should be seen and not heard, and that many adults feel they know what children want (SCSA 2018:02). Bala (2018:7) also mentions that, even though efforts have been made to bring children into the decision-making process when those decisions concern them, there are still challenges related to involving them fully. This is due to adults' lack of trust in

them, and their unwillingness to fully involve children. These barriers often prevent the full implementation of children's participation rights.

Children's participation rights help to bring about the realisation of all UNCRC rights and prepare children for an active role in society in future (Davis, 2019:40). As such, rights are an investment in children's futures (Ben-Arieh et al., 2014:15). Viviers (2010:30) indicates that the right to participate enables children to challenge abuses and neglects of their rights and to act to promote and protect those rights. Moreover, understanding children's views and concerns can help us to identify those factors that support or hinder their development, creating a more comprehensive picture of children's life situations (Bradshaw et al., 2006:7). Importantly, children's participation contributes to their personal development and empowerment, raises their awareness of their rights, and boosts their self-confidence (Bala, 2018:13). This implies that supporting children's right to participation can be associated with independence and sustainable futures for children. Giving children opportunities to make choices and to attempt tasks may assist them in taking on bigger responsibilities in future and becoming competent members of society (AGDE, 2013:1). Grill (2020:199) adds that giving children choices is a useful way to avoid forcing them into doing things against their wishes, which consequently negatively impacts their well-being.

Evidence reveals that children have agency, can be influential in their communities, can make positive changes, and can lead development initiatives. Malala Yousafzai, who was one of the winners of the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize, is a good example of this (Movshovich, 2014:6). Similarly, a widely acknowledged turning point in South Africa's history and the anti-apartheid struggle was the 1976 student uprising against the government. Instances like these, where children demand quality education, show the important role children can play in changing their destinies while declaring their ability to claim both their rights and political power through participation (Moses, 2006 in Viviers & Lombard, 2012:8). This shows that children demonstrate significant abilities as capable citizens who can take on responsibilities and active roles in their communities (Movshovich 2014:15). As a result of this, the choices of children should be respected. In addition, making children partners in change means holding governments accountable to a larger and more united public, which will form a solid foundation for a sustainable path of development (Movshovich, 2014:3). Some countries have already started including the voices of children by lowering the voting

age so that young voters may have a say in the way in which their country is run (UNICEF, 2022:27). Participation, therefore, can create futures that are free from social ills such as poverty, inequality, lack of basic services, and crime, which can only be achieved if children's perspectives on child well-being are identified and incorporated into development and intervention plans. Grill (2020:200) supports this notion, saying that, if children become more capable decision-makers now, their long-term well-being as future adults will be positively impacted.

The participation of children in determining their own well-being depends on the interactions between the individual and their immediate environment, as illustrated by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Ben-Arieh & Frone, 2011:466), which, as was mentioned earlier on in this mini-dissertation, forms the theoretical lens through which child well-being is explored in this study. The next sub-heading unpacks these levels of interaction.

2.10 Ecological systems theoretical framework

The ecological systems theory views the child as embedded in a series of complex and interactive systems (Louw et al., 2014:29). The ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures (Bronfenbrenner 1979:3). According to this theory, child development is based on four concentric circles of environmental influence, with time as a significant factor which acknowledges both individual changes over time, and historical changes (Ben-Arieh & Frønes 2011:466). Miley, O'Meila and Dubois (2009:38) note that a change in one part of the system alters another part of the system, which changes the functioning of the system as a whole.

The first level of the ecological systems theory is the microsystem, which forms the immediate environment of the child and consists of the child's family, peers, school, church, and neighbourhood (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:25; Louw et al., 2014:29). This system also has subsystems. This is where the child is an active participant (Onwuengbuzie, Collins & Frels, 2013:4; Newland et al., 2019:397). The child interacts primarily with their family, but they also interact with a range of other people and systems, like friends, neighbours, health care workers, teachers, and playmates. A variety of studies link aspects such as positive family and peer relationships to child well-being, while aspects such as parental stress, psychological problems, attachment problems, and poor parent-child interactions can negatively affect child well-being

within the microsystem (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814; Newland et al., 2019:398). From an ecological systems approach, an understanding of the system that is closest to the child is important for social work intervention (Langer & Lietz, 2014:33) since it has a direct influence on the child's development.

The second level of the ecological systems theory is the mesosystem, where different microsystems meet and influence each other. Children's academic performance, for example, does not only depend on classroom teaching. It is also enhanced when parents are involved in the child's school activities and in the child's learning at home (Louw et al., 2014:29). The well-being of children who grow up in poverty can be enhanced by connections between community resources and activities such as school and after-school programmes, and youth groups (Berk, 2013:27). During their assessments, social workers consider the child's relationships in the different microsystems and how these can influence each other in fostering well-being (Langer & Lietz, 2014:33). Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok (2019:474) suggest that, in modern times, the virtual world that is created by online social technologies should be considered an environment that influences children's subjective well-being. They describe the virtual context as "an arena through which children communicate with friends and family and in which their social relationships are practised in varied micro systems" (Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, (2019:472).

The exosystem is the third level of the ecological systems theory, and it contains social settings such as the parents' informal and formal support networks, social networks of friends, extended family members, the parents' work settings, the media, religious institutions, and access to basic services (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:25; Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:29). This is the ecological system in which the child does not actively take part. However, the development of the child is indirectly affected by the events that occur in the exosystem (Onwuegbuzie, Collins & Frels, 2013:4). Factors such as unemployment, poverty, and social isolation have a negative influence on the exosystem (Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:29). Notably, poverty or low socioeconomic status is seen as one of the most influential factors in terms of child and family well-being. Therefore, interventions to support parents and enhance the quality of parenting can buffer children against adverse social environments (Alaya-Nunes et al., 2018:814).

The macrosystem is the fourth level of the ecological systems theory, which refers to the broader systems in society which influence the child's development over time. These include culture, values, ideologies, customs, resources, policies, legislation, politics, programmes, and environmental factors (Arnett & Maynard, 2017:26; Langer & Lietz, 2014:33-34; Louw et al., 2014:29). As with the other ecological levels, the nature of the macrosystem influences the overall well-being of a child (Newland et al., 2019:398). Research shows that the subjective well-being of children is higher in countries that have policies that promote aspects such as preschool education, family services, family benefits, and paid parental leave (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814).

In ecological systems theory, Bronfenbrenner included a temporal dimension level which he calls the chronosystem. The chronosystem indicates that children's environment is not static, but changes over time (Berk, 2013:28; Louw et al., 2014:30). Changes occur due to children's development and changes in their immediate and wider environments, such as relocation, school entry, or loss of a parent, for example (Louw et al., 2014:30). The temporal dimension can be linked to the fact that well-being is a dynamic process (Casas & Frønes, 2019:2; Minkkinen, 2013:3), and that change can occur over time and from one developmental stage to the next. The ecological systems approach therefore gives a comprehensive overview of child well-being, where the focus is on "a wide array of dimensions nested in children's proximal and distal contexts that are known to be directly or indirectly influential on different dimensions of well-being" (Alaya-Nunes et al., 2018:816). The ecological approach affirms that there is a mutually dependent relationship between people and the environment that helps them cope with stressors (Masoga & Shokane, 2017:4).

Based on the ecological systems theory, child development and well-being are influenced by the environment, and individual and historical changes that occur over time (Ben-Arieh & Frønes 2011:466). In addition, human development takes place through a process of increasingly more complex and mutual interaction between the human being and their immediate environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994:38). It is also, however, important to consider how research participants develop as they interact with their environment. The next sub-heading will focus on the characteristics of middle childhood, as the participants in this study are in that stage of childhood themselves.

2.11 Characteristics of middle childhood

Middle childhood is the developmental stage between the ages of six and twelve years which is described by Arnett (2016:300) as the period “when children develop a better grasp of what the physical world is really like and what is and is not possible”. It is characterised by rapid developmental growth and varied experiences that will influence the child’s adjustment to their adolescent years (Louw & Louw, 2014:225).

In this developmental stage, children’s physical development involves rapid physical growth that leads to an improvement in their fine and gross motor skills, balance, strength, mobility, vision, and eye-hand coordination (Berk, 2013:178; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:32; Louw & Louw, 2014:227). Children also acquire academic skills such as writing, reading, and mathematics. In addition, their memory, concentration, and attention span increase (Berk, 2013:6; Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37). They begin to master language, a fact that is made evident with an increase in vocabulary and the use of longer and more complex sentences (Louw & Louw, 2014:234; Martorell, Papalia & Feldman, 2014:291). However, their cognitive development and skills will be influenced by the socio-cultural context in which they grow up (Arnett, 2016:368; Martorell et al., 2014:379).

From the age of eight years, children begin to cognitively understand space. They begin to demonstrate this understanding in their drawings and descriptions, an ability referred to as “map skills” (Berk, 2013:251). Key developmental tasks are the ability to make judgements about cause and effect, and to understand the views of others (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37; Martorell et al., 2014:360). At this stage, the child’s social world expands significantly to include the school environment, peers, and the community, and they learn the knowledge and skills that are required by their cultural context (Arnett, 2016:23; Louw & Louw, 2014:257, 299; Martorell et al., 2014:395). This is an interplay between different subsystems in the microsystems in which the child actively participates. According to Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, children of this age are in the stage of industry and inferiority, wherein they learn the social, physical, practical, and academic skills that are necessary for them to adjust to an adult world (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:41). At the same time, they gain a better understanding of the self and others, including conceptions of individuals, groups, and relationships (Berk, 2013:5-6; Louw & Louw, 2014:233, 255). They develop a clearer self-concept, compare their qualities to those of their peers, and can describe

themselves in terms of external, internal, psychological, and social aspects of the self (Louw & Louw, 2014:257). They also develop the ability to distinguish the self from others, as well as to form an idea of the “real self” (who they are) and the “ideal self” (who they would like to be) (Louw & Louw, 2014:256-257). This means that, as children intermingle with others, they discover who they are and start compiling a list of their own needs. According to Mūderrisoğlu et al. (2013:7) children are agents of their own experience and well-being. They make use of the relationships, resources, and environmental conditions available to them. It is therefore important to understand and take into consideration their needs and feelings.

Children in middle childhood seek recognition for, and gain satisfaction from, completing interesting and meaningful tasks (Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). When they are given tasks that they can accomplish, and receive appropriate guidance from adults, children will have a greater chance of experiencing a sense of understanding (Arnett, 2016:23; Martorell et al., 2014:395; Thomas, 2005:93). For many children, their potential to acquire age-appropriate abilities may develop late or not at all, due to a lack of encouragement or support (Thomas, 2005:93).

During middle childhood, friendships become important, and the focus of friendship is on loyalty and faithfulness among friends. Peer acceptance is a crucial factor for children’s socio-emotional well-being (Louw & Louw, 2014:276, 299). This being said, parents and family in the microsystem continue to play a significant role in their lives and development. Positive relationships with parents, siblings, and peers are known to enhance children’s well-being (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:43).

Emotional development during middle childhood involves developing the ability to understand complex emotions and the capacity to display emotions (Berk, 2013:419; Louw & Louw, 2014:233, 299). Between the ages of six and eight years, children start to mentally reflect on their emotions (Berk, 2013:412). They can talk about their own emotions, understand events that influence their emotions, understand that they can experience more than one emotion in a certain situation, and can identify circumstances that lead to positive or negative emotions (Berk, 2013:415-416; Louw & Louw, 2014:259). Their skills for emotional self-regulation develop, and by the age of ten years, they are able to use emotional regulation strategies such as thinking about how they can solve a problem or, if this is not possible, how they can control

their distress (Berk, 2013:412; Martorell et al., 2014:395). During the primary school years, children's empathy increases. Their understanding of their own and other people's emotions improves, they learn to understand the emotional cues of others, and they learn how to understand and respond to other people's distress (Berk, 2013:417; Martorell et al., 2014:395). Middle childhood is an important life stage for children's moral development that is, the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. This will be influenced by aspects such as the social norms of a particular family, peer groups, religion, culture, and the level of empathy of the individual child (Louw & Louw, 2014:287).

2.12 Summary

In this chapter, the theoretical concepts associated with child well-being were explored. Child well-being is a complex and multidimensional concept which measures a wide range of objective and subjective indicators. It was noted that current trends in the literature related to well-being point to the importance of children's subjective sense of well-being wherein children report on their own well-being. Also central to the discussion were the rights of children as they are set out by UNCRC (1989) and the ACRWC (1990). To reiterate, these rights were adopted by various states, including South Africa, and they provide the basis upon which the local legislative frameworks regarding the promotion of children's well-being were drafted. Most importantly, the Convention accords children the right to have their own opinions considered, which this study hopes to uphold. The ecological systems theory is a relevant theoretical framework for this study, as it explains how the different systems influence child well-being and child development, especially in middle childhood. The chapter also revealed that children are affected by events in different socio-economic and environmental systems. Therefore, these systems must be considered when studying child well-being. A discussion on child well-being in South Africa and how social work is involved in the promotion of it was also included. It was noted that the country is rife with inequalities, and that developmental social workers are guided by the professional values of social justice, human rights, and respect for people's dignity and equality as they seek to remove barriers and promote the rights and well-being of all people.

In the discussion on the importance of participation and agency above, it was evidenced that children can be influential in directing the process of change in their communities and societies. This has produced positive results, meaning that children

may be viewed as capable and worthy consultants in matters that impact their own well-being. Children cannot continue to be passive recipients of adult decisions. Rather, it should be recognised that they can change their circumstances when they are fully engaged. The evidence thus proves that children can indeed make an enormous difference in their communities and can change lives for the better only if their opinions are considered in decision-making. The evidence indicates that the involvement of children is paramount in creating sustainable futures, which underscores the importance of recognising them as human beings that are imbued with agency. Furthermore, the concept of child well-being is multifaceted and is anchored in interactions between individual and environmental factors at distinct levels, as was indicated through the use of ecological systems theory.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology used for the study. The research approach, type, and design are presented, followed by the methods, study population, study sample, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures. The ethical considerations that the study applied are presented, followed by the limitations of the study and a summary of the chapter.

3.2 Research approach

This study made use of a qualitative research approach. This approach was appropriate, as it emphasises exploring and understanding the meaning which a person ascribes to a social problem (Creswell 2014 in Asenahabi, 2019:81). This aligns with the goal of the study to explore children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context. In order to satisfy the objectives of this research, a paradigm of interpretivism was chosen. This is because interpretivism views reality as a social construct that can be understood by studying people in their social settings (Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:67). Moreover, it attempts to understand individuals' interpretations of the social phenomena with which they interact (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:55). This is also consistent with the study's aim to understand how children conceptualise their own well-being. The researcher adopted the viewpoint that children can interpret events and provide multiple perspectives of well-being, since the interpretivism paradigm is subjective and indicates a belief in socially constructed and multiple realities (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016:56). A qualitative research approach uses verbal descriptions provided by the participants themselves in order to demonstrate the phenomenon being studied (Fouché & Delport, 2011:64; Nieuwenhuis, 2019a:59). However, qualitative research is limited by the fact that the resultant research findings cannot be generalised (Anney, 2014:272).

3.3 Type of research

The aim of this research was to gain an understanding of the perspectives of children on child well-being that can inform social work practice to develop effective and sustainable service delivery programmes best suited to the needs of children. The study's findings could contribute to finding solutions to problems or to inform policies

that promote well-being and sustainable futures for children (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94; Rubin & Babbie, 2017:145).

3.4 Research design

Case study research design particularly an instrumental case study was used during the course of this study. This is an appropriate strategy to use when “how” and “why” questions are asked (Nieuwenhuis 2019b:90). In the case of this study, the focus was on how children describe their well-being. This research design proposes a close collaboration between the researcher and participants, which allows participants to share their stories and thoughts freely, and, in doing so, enables the researcher to gain an understanding of the participants’ social worlds (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320; Nieuwenhuis 2019b:90). Woodside (2010 in Asenahabi, 2019:82) says that a case study is an inquiry that focuses on describing, understanding, and predicting the unit under study. Because of this, this research design was used in order to learn more about the perspectives of South African children regarding their own well-being. Moreover, a case study provides subjective information rather than objective information (Asenahabi, 2019:82), which allowed the researcher to understand the perceptions of children regarding their own well-being. Thus, the instrumental case study design was used to explore the participants’ perceptions of child well-being to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon and of the participants’ needs and views on the phenomenon (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:90).

3.5 Research methodology

This section provides a detailed account of the methods that were used in this study, including the study population, sampling technique, data collection, and data analysis.

3.5.1 Study population

The goal of the study was to collect data on the perspectives of children in middle childhood, between the ages of eight and twelve years, on child well-being within the South African context. The study population was thus children in the middle childhood development stage in the suburbs of Halfway Gardens in Midrand, Johannesburg.

3.5.2 Sampling and sampling techniques

The study used a non-probability purposive sampling technique to include participants who were able to provide answers to the research question and yield rich information

on children's perspectives on their well-being (Neuman, 2014:274; Strydom & Delpont, 2011:392). The inclusion criteria for the study sample were as follows:

- Children between the ages of eight and twelve years.
- Children who can converse in English.
- Children whose parents or guardians provided permission for them to participate in the study.
- Children who provided their assent to voluntarily participate in the study.

The researcher made use of snowball sampling to recruit participants for the study. According to Naderifar, Goli and Ghaljaie (2017:2), snowball sampling is a technique that is used to find unreachable populations in which the first sample will probably lead the researcher to other samples. Initially, the researcher approached potential participants that were known to her and asked for their assistance in gaining access to the parents or guardians of other potential participants. The researcher then contacted those parents who indicated their willingness for their child to participate in the study, and those who agreed were given consent forms to sign. Furthermore, the children provided written assent to willingly participate in the study. The researcher furthermore respected the decision of those children who declined participation in the study.

3.5.3 Data collection

Data was collected by means of semi-structured, one-on-one interviews that made use of an interview schedule (see Appendix A). The interview schedule contained a set of open-ended, predetermined questions that were used to guide the discussion and allow participants to share their perspectives without limitations (Mock, 2005 in Mafokane & Shirindi, 2018:40). The interviews were useful in gaining information on the participants' views on the topic and provided the researcher with the flexibility to explore information in more detail (Bless, Higson-Smith, & Sithole, 2013:197; Greeff, 2011:351-252). The method was useful in this study for several reasons. Firstly, it helped the researcher to gain a thorough understanding of children's perceptions on child well-being by clarifying the information given and by probing, where more details were needed from participants' answers. Secondly, it provided the researcher with time to prepare the questions that participants were to be asked and, thirdly, semi-

structured interviews produced reliable and richly descriptive data (Adams, 2015:492-494).

Ten participants who met the criteria were recruited, depending on whether data saturation had been achieved. Data saturation can be described as “a point during the interviews when the researcher realises that no new information is being garnered from the participants” (Makofane & Shirindi, 2018:34) and further data collection is no longer useful. The researcher made prior appointments with the individual participants of the time, venue and anticipated duration of the interviews so that preparations could be done accordingly.

The interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the participants and their parents or guardians’ consent. The researcher took field notes during the interview in order to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives of children on their well-being (Schurink, Fouché & De Vos, 2011:404; Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:110). Given that children may not understand the full scope of the factors that influence child well-being, visual communication cards were also used to complement the interview schedule (Nieuwenhuis, 2019b:103). The cards illustrated pictures of domains related to child well-being such as a family, home, school, running water, and food (see Appendix A). However, the researcher first used open-ended questions so that the children could express themselves freely. Thereafter, the visual cards were introduced as further prompts to ensure the different domains of child well-being were addressed. The cards thus served as a funnelling technique to gain information on more specific aspects related to child well-being (Greeff, 2011:352-353). The cards were used to direct the exploration of information, as well as to keep the child’s focus and attention without relying too heavily on questioning.

3.5.4 Data analysis

Qualitative research is a valued paradigm of inquiry that requires rigorous and systematic methods if useful results are to be acquired (Nowell et al., 2017:1). In order to provide a rigorous analysis of the collected data, the thematic data analysis which is underpinned by the philosophy of qualitative research (Nowell et al., 2017:4) was utilised in this study. Data analysis firstly involved transcriptions of interviews, and analysis thereof in order to determine themes and sub-themes for reporting the data (Clarke et al., 2015:124; Ebersöhn, Eloff & Ferreira, 2019:177). Data analysis occurred

in the following phases as outlined by Clarke et al. (2015:230) and Nowell et al. (2017:4).

➤ **Phase 1: Familiarisation**

During this phase, and since all interviews were digitally recorded, the researcher transcribed, organised, and actively read and re-read the data in a critical way in order to become familiar with the entire data set (Clarke et al., 2015:231, Nowell et al., 2017:4-5). The researcher went through the interview transcripts and notes taken during the interviews to obtain a general idea of the content of the data, and made notes of thoughts, questions or initial interpretations while reading through the data (Bless et al., 2018:342; Nowell et al., 2017:5).

➤ **Phase 2: Coding**

The researcher created initial codes of important elements in the data that were interesting in relation to the research question (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121). This involved systematically working through the data, revisiting it repeatedly, assigning codes to data in the form of short phrases, and reviewing the assigned codes (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121; Nowell et al., 2017:6). The researcher thoroughly scrutinised and clustered data into different codes in order to highlight the different aspects of child well-being as they appear in the narratives of the participants. Coding, and assigning a label to each code, forms the foundation for the development of the themes in phase 3 (Clarke et al, 2015:234).

➤ **Phase 3: Generating themes.**

In this phase, the researcher sorted through the different codes and combined relevant codes into initial or potential themes (Nowell et al., 2017:8). Codes that were related, for instance, to the meaning of child well-being and factors that influence child well-being were grouped to form themes, as they captured data that was important for answering the research question and presented a certain level of meaning (Braun, Clarke, Hayfied & Terry, 2019:844). Theme levels that were established consisted of overarching themes and sub-themes, which were tabulated in order to visually show the identified themes (Braun et al., 2019:844-845; Clarke et al., 2015:236). A thematic table helped the researcher to develop individual themes and to search for the relationships between the themes (Clarke et al., 2015:38).

➤ **Phase 4: Reviewing potential themes.**

In this phase, the researcher began refining the themes in order to establish how they fit together in relation to the research question (Nowell et al., 2017:9). Codes that overlapped were combined or deleted, or a new code was constructed (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121; Nowell et al., 2017:10). On conclusion of this phase, the researcher had gained a general idea of what the different themes entail and how they fit together to tell a coherent story (Braun & Clarke, 2006:92; Nowell et al., 2017:9-10).

➤ **Phase 5: Defining and naming themes.**

The aim of this phase was to ensure that the uniqueness of each theme was captured (Braun et al., 2019:846:). The researcher wrote theme definitions consisting of a short description that explains the scope and boundaries of each theme and assigned theme names that describe the essence of each theme (see Chapter Four, Table 2) (Clarke et al., 2015:240). The name was clearly defined in order to make an immediate impression and to give the reader an idea of what the theme is (Clarke et al., 2015:240; Nowell et al., 2017:10).

➤ **Phase 6: Writing the report.**

During this final analysis phase, the researcher constructed a write-up of the report, which is an integral part of the data analysis process (Clarke & Braun, 2013:121). Quotations from the participants' exact responses were included for each theme and sub-theme, and literature was interwoven with the participants' quotes, followed by a discussion of the findings. This was intended to enhance the quality of the study. However, because of its flexibility, thematic analysis can lead to inconsistencies, which makes measures of reliability important (Nowell et al., 2017:2-3). Ensuring data quality was thus a crucial aspect of the study.

3.6 Data quality

Data quality was ensured using measures that were intended to enhance the reliability of the research findings. The researcher ensured that the perspectives of the participants were represented truthfully (Bless et al., 2013:236; Schurink et al., 2011:419). In order to ensure the reliability of the data collected during the study, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were to be considered and confirmed (Nowell et al., 2017:3).

3.6.1 Credibility

In this study, data's credibility was ensured by checking that the information collected from participants was presented and interpreted correctly, and that the data was relevant to the research question and research methodology (Schurink et al., 2011:419-420). The researcher used a strategy of peer debriefing, in that the data was discussed with her fellow students and two transcripts were sent to the supervisor, who is knowledgeable on research methodology. The researcher obtained feedback from the supervisor which helped in determining the appropriateness of the interpretations from the collected data and the analysis thereof (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:101). In addition, member checking was employed whereby three transcribed interviews were sent to the participants so that the accuracy of the verbatim transcriptions in the study could be checked (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:193).

3.6.2 Transferability

To enhance transferability of the research findings, the researcher made use of a strategy known as thick description, wherein the participants, context, and research design of this study were compared against other contexts in practice (Anney, 201:278; Nieuwenhuis, 2019c:144-145; Nowell et al., 2017:3). It is difficult to generalise qualitative research findings (Schurink et al., 2011:420), but the transferability of the data that was collected in this study was enhanced by ensuring credibility, and by describing the research setting and findings comprehensively (Lietz & Zayas, 2010:195). The study could thus be repeated elsewhere in a similar context.

3.6.3 Dependability

The researcher enhanced the dependability of the research by clearly and logically documenting the research process, so that others will be able to follow and judge this study for its reliability (Nowell et al., 2017:3). Here, once again, the researcher underwent a process of peer debriefing with a colleague who assessed some of the findings to support the dependability of the study (Schurink et al., 2011:420).

3.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the way in which data is analysed in order to assemble the findings of the research. Confirmability should be neutral, and uninfluenced by the researcher's motivation or interests (Nowell et al., 2017:3). To ensure the confirmability of the study, the first interview was checked by the researcher's

supervisor. Because confirmability and objectivity are concepts that are closely linked, the researcher was reflexive in her approach to the study. Being a parent herself, the researcher, acknowledged her personal biases and she, as far as possible, maintained an awareness of how her own views, actions, and decisions can impact data collection and data analysis (Schurink et al., 2011:421).

3.7 Pilot study

The researcher conducted a pilot study in order “to determine whether the methodology, sampling, instruments and analysis were adequate and appropriate” (Bless et al., 2013:394). The pilot study was also a useful tool for checking whether the chosen research methods were effective in producing data that responded to the research question (Arain, Campbell, Cooper & Lancaster, 2010:2; Mafokane & Shirindi, 2018: 41). The pilot study took place with the first two participants who met the sampling criteria. The researcher determined whether the interview questions were adequate and comprehensible for children aged eight to twelve years, if the data collection method was effective to obtain relevant data, the approximate duration of the interviews, and whether changes needed to be made to the research methods (Strydom & Delpont, 2011:394-395). The researcher tested the use of the visual prompts that were described earlier in this mini dissertation. The pilot interviews did not highlight much need to make changes to the interview schedule, and the data was included in the study’s data set. However, it was noted during the pilot study that some of the questions were difficult for the participants to understand. One question that participants struggled with was, question 5 on section A which reads, “Who contributes to the income in your household?” and was subsequently rephrased to read, “Who makes money in the household, for example money to pay for food, rent and school fees?” The other question was question 5 on section B which reads, “What must children’s environment look like?” The researcher gave simplified versions of the word environment such as – the ground, air and the general appearance of participants’ surroundings.

3.8 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are the moral principles, procedures, and methods that must be adhered to by social researchers. These considerations provide guidance in terms of suitable courses of action, and how to address complex ethical issues (Strydom, 2011:114). It ensures that researchers do not put their need to carry out research above their responsibility to maintain the well-being of participants (Mills, 2014:24). The various ethical principles that guided the researcher are listed and described below.

3.8.1 Permission to carry out the study.

The researcher applied for institutional ethical approval before the commencement of the research process, and high ethical standards were maintained throughout the research project. The application for ethical clearance was approved by the Research Ethics Committee in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Pretoria (see Appendix B). Upon receipt of the faculty's notice of approval, data collection commenced. The study was conducted as coursework in partial fulfilment of a master's programme in the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria, where students conducted individual studies on the topic.

3.8.2 Voluntary participation and informed consent and assent

Participation in the study was voluntary and the participants had the right to withdraw at any time during the research process, without the risk of any negative consequences (Maree, 2020:48). Research participants were well informed of their right to withdraw at any point, should they feel or perceive that they were being forced to take part in the study (Strydom, 2011:118). This aspect was important, as the participants in this study were children between the ages of eight and twelve years. The participants were asked to provide their assent, and their parents were requested to provide informed consent for their child to participate in the study (see Appendices C and D). The researcher compiled an age-appropriate letter of informed assent for the participants and a letter of informed consent for their parents or guardians to sign. These letters contained information on the goal of the study, the research procedures, what participation in the study entailed, and possible advantages or risks for the participants (Maree, 2020:48; Strydom, 2011:117). Potential participants and parents or guardians could thus make an informed decision about taking part in the study or

not. They were given the opportunity to provide their signed assent forms if they agreed to participate in the study (Bless et al., 2013:30). The researcher made sure that the child participants understood what was expected of them by reading through the informed assent letter with them again, before the start of the data collection interviews, and emphasised that they could decline to participate if they so wished.

3.8.3 Avoidance of harm

As children are a vulnerable group, the researcher regarded the fundamental research principle of avoiding any physical and/or emotional harm to the participants as especially important (Bless et al., 2013:33-34; Strydom, 2011:115). The focus of the study was on the participants' perspectives of child well-being, and not their experiences associated with it. However, it was possible that the child participants might experience emotional distress in discussing topics related to child well-being. The researcher implemented measures to prevent harm to the participants. Firstly, during the recruitment of participants, the researcher (with the help of parents or guardians) took care not to include children who were deemed too vulnerable to participate in the study (Babbie, 2017:63; Strydom, 2011:115). At the start of data collection interviews, the researcher ensured that children knew that they could withdraw from the study at any time, and that they were not obliged to answer questions that made them uneasy. They were also assured that there would be no negative consequences if they did not want to answer a question, or if they wished to withdraw from the study, and that the researcher would respect their wishes (Babbie, 2017:66; Strydom, 2011:115). The researcher was vigilant and took care to recognise signs of discomfort during the interviews. In the event of any emotional distress, arrangements were made for telephonic or online counselling, free of charge (Maree, 2019:49).

Within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, special measures were taken to ensure the safety of the participants and the researcher. The following measures were adhered to:

- The researcher and participants wore protective face masks that always covered their mouths and noses.
- A personal distance of one and half meters was maintained.

- Hands were disinfected with a suitable disinfectant upon arrival and during the interviews.
- Interviews were conducted in a room with an open window and door, with no other people in the immediate environment.
- Writing materials and communication cards were not shared. Communication cards were duplicated for each child.
- The work surfaces were disinfected before and after each interview.

The above measures were stipulated in the letters of informed assent.

3.8.4 Privacy and confidentiality

The researcher upheld the ethical principle of privacy by allowing the participants to decide what information to share or not share during the interviews (Strydom, 2011:119). Participants were informed that they could refrain from answering any question if they so wished. All personal information about the participants and the data were kept strictly confidential (Maree, 2020:48, Strydom, 2011:119). The researcher used pseudonyms (P1 to P10) for the participants in order to protect their identities. Additionally, it was ensured that no identifying documents of the participants were accessed by anyone other than the researcher. Raw data was kept secure throughout the study. After the study's conclusion, this data will be securely stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology for ten years, in line with the stipulations of the University of Pretoria. Only the researcher will have the ability to link responses to a specific participant (Strydom, 2011:119).

3.8.5 Avoidance of deception

The researcher ensured that the participants and their parents or guardians were informed about the true nature of the research and that no deception occurs (Bless et al., 2013:34). The researcher did not withhold information regarding the study, and the nature of the study was not misrepresented (Strydom, 2011:118-119).

3.8.6 Debriefing of participants

The debriefing of participants is a process in which both the researcher and the participants of the study are provided with a learning opportunity (Strydom, 2011:122). The researcher ended each interview with a debrief by giving participants a chance to talk about their experience of taking part in the study, to rectify any misconceptions that might have occurred, and to monitor whether the participants experienced any

discomfort during their participation in the study (Babbie, 2017:71; Strydom, 2011:122). Because the participants were children in middle childhood, the researcher took note of the fact that debriefing must be done in order “to ensure that participants are not left with bad feelings or doubts about themselves based on their performance in the study” (Bless et al., 2013:35). The researcher abided with the boundaries of her role, and kept the interviews focused on data gathering and debriefing, and not on providing counselling to the participants (Maree, 2020:49).

3.8.7 Actions and competence of the researcher

The study was conducted based on the knowledge and skills gained in attending an advanced module in research as part of the masters’ degree that the researcher was enrolled for. Furthermore, the researcher respected the dignity and rights of the participants (Bless et al., 2013:31). Being a registered social worker, the researcher abided by the social work values stated by the South African Council for Social Service Professions (1979). These include respect for the human rights, dignity, and worth of all human beings, competence, and showing concern for the well-being of others. To further enhance her competencies, the researcher conducted a thorough literature study on the research topic and was guided by a research supervisor throughout the study (Strydom, 2011:123). The research findings were presented truthfully, and the work of other researchers were duly acknowledged (Babbie, 2017:72; Strydom, 2011:123).

3.8.8 Publication of findings

The ultimate purpose of research is to release one’s findings to the scholarly community and broader public. The findings of the study as presented in this research report will be accessible through the University of Pretoria’s institutional repository. The research report contains an accurate overview of the study, and the findings have not been manipulated (Babbie, 2017:72; Strydom, 2011:126). In other words, the findings were honestly reported, and all the study’s pitfalls and problems encountered were indicated in the overview. The researcher informed the participants and their parents or guardians beforehand, in the informed assent and consent letters, that the findings of the research study may be published in a written format for academic purposes, while maintaining anonymity for the participants’ protection.

3.9 Limitations of the study

Since the study adopted a qualitative approach, there were some limitations in terms of data collection and interpretation. The study was only carried out in a small suburban area of Midrand, which means that the views of children in other parts of Midrand or, indeed, South Africa, were not represented. In addition, the fact that the study focused on collecting subjective information, there is a possibility that biases are present in the information that was collected, which may be difficult to identify and address.

3.10 Summary

The chapter presented the research methodology that was used in this study. It discussed the qualitative research approach as it was applied to the study, as well as the instrumental case study research design and the interpretivism paradigm. The chapter also discussed the population of the study and the sampling techniques used, as well as the data collection methods and data analysis. This was followed by the way in which data quality was assured and the ethical considerations that were adhered to during the study, as well as the study's limitations.

CHAPTER FOUR: EMPIRICAL STUDY AND FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the findings of the research conducted during this study. The research question that guided the study was this: What are children's perspectives on child well-being as a pathway to sustainable futures within the South African context?

The chapter starts with a presentation of the biographical information of the participants. The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings will then be presented and discussed. The chapter will end with a summary.

4.2 Biographical details of research participants

The biographical information of the participants is summarised in Table 4.1 below. It includes their gender, age, school grade, number of family members, and the main contributors of household income. To protect the identity of the participants (P) assigned pseudonyms will be indicated in numbers, ranging from P1-P10.

Table 4.1: Biographical profile of participants

Participants	Gender	Age	Grade	Number of family members in participants' household	Contributors of income in participants' household	Sources of income in participants' household
P1	Female	12	8	5	Mother & father	Formal jobs
P2	Female	9	5	5	Father	Formal job
P3	Female	12	7	7	Mother & aunt	Formal jobs
P4	Male	9	4	4	Mother & father	Formal jobs
P5	Male	12	7	5	Father	Formal job
P6	Female	12	8	4	Mother & father	Formal jobs
P7	Male	11	6	4	Mother & father	Formal jobs
P8	Female	10	5	6	Father	Formal job
P9	Male	11	5	3	Father	Formal job
P10	Female	10	5	5	Mother	Formal job

As indicated in Table 4.1, all ten participants were between the ages of nine and twelve years old with an average age of 10.8 years. Four participants were twelve years old, while two each were nine, ten and eleven years old. As indicated by the study's sampling criteria, the children fell in the middle childhood category. Six out of the ten participants were females, and four were males. The biographical details also include the participants' grades, number of family members in participants' households, and the sources of income in their households. As shown in Table 4.1, four participants were in grade 5, while two participants were each in grades 7 and 8. Grades 4 and 6 had one participant each. The table also indicates that the main sources of income for the ten participants' households are formal jobs, with the number of family members in participants' households ranging between three and seven people. It can be noted from the table that five of the participants' households have two family members who contribute to the household income, while five households have only one family member contributing to the household income.

4.3 Key themes and sub-themes

The themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data are displayed in Table 4.2. The discussion per theme starts with a summary of the findings, followed by the direct voices of the participants, and verification by existing literature on the topic. The discussion will be guided by the theoretical framework of the study.

Table 4.2: Themes and sub-themes

Theme	Sub-themes
1. Participants' understanding of child well-being	1.1 Experiencing emotions of happiness 1.2 Being loved and cared for 1.3 Basic needs being met
2. Contribution of significant others towards child well-being	2.1 Family 2.2 Friends 2.3 Schoolteachers
3. Social factors that influence child well-being	3.1 Relationship with parents 3.2 Interacting and relaxing with peers 3.3 Friendly and safe social environment 3.4 Bullying at school

	3.5 Lack of participation and consultation in decision making
4. Environmental factors that influence child well-being	4.1 Clean and healthy natural environment
5. Children's contributions towards their own well-being	5.1 Help cleaning their homes. 5.2 Cleaning up the community and calling on others to join them
6. How children's agency can be promoted to enhance their well-being	6.1 Adults must involve children in decisions that concern them. 6.2 Adults must respect children's opinions and choices when they make decisions

Theme 1: Understanding of child well-being.

Findings indicate that participants equate child well-being with experiencing positive emotions, being loved and cared for, and having their basic needs met. These views will be next discussed as sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1.1: Experiencing emotions of happiness.

According to the participants, well-being could be described as an experience of feeling happy and feeling as though there is nothing bothering them. They were generally of the opinion that children must always be happy and enjoy life without anything or anyone causing them distress. This is illustrated in some of the participants' responses, below.

P7: *When I am happy and there is nothing that makes me sad.*

P6: *When I'm happy all the time.*

P10: *When I am very happy and not stressed.*

The participants' responses confirm that well-being involves judgements of life satisfaction and an evaluation of feelings (Rigby et al., 2018:01). Feelings of happiness relate to the subjective aspects of well-being (Carter, 2015:107). Western and Tomaszewski (2016:2) concur that well-being is centred on people's own assessments of their lives, and on their cognitive evaluation of their happiness and unhappiness. The participants' expressions of their feelings are indicative of the middle childhood

phase, where children can talk about their own emotions, understand events that influence their emotions, and can identify circumstances that lead to positive or negative emotions (Berk, 2013:415-416; Louw & Louw, 2014:259).

Sub-theme 1.2: Being loved and cared for

Participants also viewed well-being as the experience of having loving and caring people around them. This indicates that their own well-being depends on how parents and other people in their lives treat them. This idea is voiced in the following responses from the participants:

P1: *When my parents take good care of me.*

P3: *...and when everyone is nice and not mean to me.*

P4: *...and I also want my parents to love me more and care for me.*

P8: *When people are caring and welcoming.*

These responses highlight the concept of social well-being, which is based on how people perceive the quality of their relationships with others in their social networks, neighbourhoods, and communities (Keyes & Shapiro, 2004 in Dunaeva, 2018:568). The need for amiable, caring, and welcoming people with which to interact confirms that the promotion of child well-being requires favourable social circumstances and positive relationships between the child and their significant others, as pointed out by Minkkinen (2013:5). In line with the participants' responses, Fattore and Mason (2017: 279) note that parents are important for the well-being of children, because they are sources of care, support, and happiness, and because they provide the child with a sense of belonging. Children's need to be cared for is embedded in the ACRWC's objective to ensure that African children receive care that will promote their emotional, physical, mental, and moral well-being (Hansungule & Boezaart, 2017:45). Similarly, the Children's Act 38 of 2005 makes provision for the care and protection of children against abuse.

Sub-theme 1.3: Basic needs being met.

Well-being was also experienced by participants as the fulfillment of basic needs. They are satisfied with their own life when their basic human needs such as food, health, shelter, and clothes are met. The participants also articulated their belief that these

needs are human rights. This is exemplified in the following responses from the participants:

P2: *... and when my basic needs are met, like when they give me food, and a home and when I am safe.*

P5: *When my health is good, when I am not hungry and that all my human rights are fulfilled.*

P9: *.... when they give me shelter, food, clothes and make sure my health is fine.*

These findings relate to objective indicators of well-being which include income, food, housing, and social aspects of well-being such as education and health (Western & Tomaszewski, 2016:2). According to Casas and Frönes (2019:3), these measurable indicators are useful in determining whether children's needs are met or not. The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) supports the view that well-being involves meeting the needs of children with Section 28(1)(c) articulating the rights of the child to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care, and social services. The Constitution ensures that children's needs are met, in that each articulated right concerns a certain human need. Therefore, children's needs are met and promoted through legislation.

Theme 2: Contribution of significant others towards child well-being

Participants identified family, friends, and schoolteachers as individuals who play an important role in their lives and well-being.

Sub-theme 2.1: Contribution of family towards child well-being

The findings of this study show that the family is vital to upholding child well-being. This is because the family provides the child with their basic needs, such as food, shelter, love, care, protection, emotional support, education, and clothing, as indicated by the responses below.

P1: *I need my family because they feed me, protect me, and give me what I need to stay healthy and grow well.*

P2: *My family comforts me when I am sad.*

P4: *...and my family gives me a roof over my head.*

P6: *My family makes me feel loved and cared for, give me love, food, home and take me to school.*

P7: *I want my family because they give me love and care, shelter, food, clothes and they treat me well.*

P10: *My parents give me food, shelter, clothes, water, good education, transport and stationery, and they teach me good manners.*

The findings demonstrate that the family is the provider of the majority of a child's needs, which influences their well-being. This sentiment is echoed by Fattore and Mason (2017:279), who explain that families are sources of care, support, and happiness for children, and that they give their children a sense of belonging. Children's well-being also depends on the ability of the family to provide for their needs, since they are dependent on their parents' socio-economic status (Newlands et al., 2019: 398). The South African approach to enhancing child well-being and welfare acknowledges the importance of the family. This approach emphasises prevention and early intervention services, which are aimed at supporting children's families in order to increase their capacity to provide for the children's needs (September 2008:146). Intervention programmes, such as the child support grant, have assisted many parents in meeting children's basic needs, and there is evidence that suggests that the recipients of the grant are better off in terms of education, health, and having their basic needs met (DSD, SASSA & UNICEF, 2012).

Sub-theme 2.2: Contribution of friends towards child well-being

Friends are also important to children's well-being, as they contribute significantly to meeting a child's socio-emotional and esteem needs, providing support with schoolwork, and helping them to relax. The participants indicated this in their responses below.

P1: *... they help me when I am sad and also when I do not understand some things in class.*

P2: *.... friends comfort me as well...*

P6: *My friends help me during exams and explain to me where I don't understand.*

P7: *My friends make me happy and confident because confidence boosts my self-esteem and not shy.*

P9: *I need my friends because I hang around and chill with them when it's boring at home and to relax and refresh after school.*

P8: *... they help me when I get hurt while playing and take me to my parents.*

The findings of this study that are related to the importance of friends in child well-being are mirrored with the views of Onwuengbuzie et al. (2013:4), and Newland et al. (2019:397) that a child's friends are part of the microsystem wherein the child actively participates and interacts with family and other people. Furthermore, during middle childhood, peer acceptance is an important factor for children's socio-emotional well-being (Louw & Louw, 2014:276). Henderson and Thompson (2016:43) note that children generally feel good when they are around friends, and they attest that positive relationships with peers are known to enhance child well-being. Mingling with friends helps children develop the ability to distinguish the self from others, as well as to form an idea of the "real" self (who they are) and the "ideal" self (who they would like to be) (Louw & Louw, 2014:256-257). Thus, according to the above findings, it is through friends that children develop a sense of their personal worth (self-esteem).

Sub-theme 2.3: Contribution of schoolteachers towards child well-being

Findings indicate that teachers play an important role in the well-being of the participants in different capacities, including fulfilling a parental role, protecting them against bullies, listening to them, and helping them to meet their social and educational needs so that they can have a better future. The following responses from the participants illustrate this:

P8: *Schoolteachers guide me at school and give me good education for my success.*

P10: *Teachers are like my second parents when I am at school. They help me when I am hurt and sad.*

P3: *... they help me to be successful and protect me from bullies at school and take care of me.*

P5: *I can talk to them when I am sad and have problems and when I don't have lunch, I can talk to them.*

In line with participants' responses, Moore and Ramirez (2016:52) concur that schools provide safe spaces for children, and act as protective environments for children who experience violence and maltreatment at home by engaging them in activities and programmes that make them feel that they belong. Berk (2013:27) shares the same view, saying that the well-being of children who grow up in poverty can be enhanced by activities during school and in after-school programmes.

Theme 3: Social factors that influence child well-being.

Participants highlighted the social factors that influence their well-being. Factors that contribute positively to their well-being include interacting and relaxing with peers, a good relationship with parents, and a pleasant and safe social environment. Factors that contribute negatively to their well-being include a bad relationship with parents, bullying, and not being considered in decision making.

Sub-theme 3.1: Relationship with parents

Participants mentioned that the kind of relationship they have with their parents also influences their well-being. According to the interviews with the participants, a good relationship with parents might be characterised by the parents being nice to them, not raising their voice, and being spoilt when they go out. The participants said that their well-being was weakened when their parents shouted at them and did not spend some time with them. These attitudes are shown by the responses below.

P1: *I enjoy it when my mother takes me shopping and spoil me, because I don't like it when we are at home where she will be pushing around, at least when we go out, she will be nice.*

P5: *I wish my parents could be nice to me all the time, I hate it when they shout, they must talk in a calm voice all the time.*

P6: *... I enjoy it when my mother is in a good mood, and we talk and laugh not when she is moody and screaming at me.*

The findings confirm that healthy family relationships and interactions are strongly and positively linked to individual well-being (Botha & Booysen, 2013:3), while poor parent-child interactions can negatively affect child well-being (Ayala-Nunes et al., 2018:814). Thus, the relationship that children have with their parents can either influence their well-being positively or negatively. The participants' responses corroborate the views

of Rees and Main, (2015:65), who state that conducive family contexts positively affect children's well-being. A similar view is also shared by Henderson and Thompson (2016:43), who explain that positive relationships with parents are known to enhance child well-being. The responses also confirm that a child in the middle childhood stage can identify circumstances that lead to positive or negative emotions (Berk, 2013:415-416; Louw & Louw, 2014:259). As evidenced by the responses, the participants were able to articulate how the different kinds of relationships influence their well-being.

Sub-theme 3.2: Interacting and relaxing with peers.

The participants felt that peer interaction and relaxation were important contributing factors to their well-being. They highlighted the importance of quiet moments and opportunities to relax, as well as the importance of being able to mingle with other children either online or outside the usual home setting. The responses below, provided by the participants, confirm these views.

P2: *I need my own room to relax and watch TV and I also enjoy playing online games with friends when I am free.*

P4: *... and during weekends or holidays we go to the park to relax and to the waterslides to enjoy with my friends and brother.*

P5: *I just want to hang around with friends at the park outside the usual home set up and I also need time to refresh from school.*

P8: *I like it when my parents take me to the park, there is so much fun there I get to see some of my school mates there.*

P10: *... and when I am relaxing in my room, I play games and interact on social media.*

Nadan and Kaye-Tzadok (2019:474) also reiterate the importance of interacting with peers during the middle childhood stage, stating that children's social world expands significantly to include the school environment, peers, and community. Interacting with peers online and via social media is described as "an arena through which children communicate with friends and family and in which their social relationships are practised in varied micro systems" (Nadan & Kaye-Tzadok, (2019:472). The two authors also recommend that, in modern times, the virtual world that is created by online social technologies should be considered an environment that influences

children's subjective well-being. Thus, interacting on social media can be an important factor in enhancing the well-being of children. Peer interaction is also confirmed to be an important factor in promoting well-being by Adams et al. (2019:555). According to them, a lack of safety in communities restricts children's exploration of the environment, and limits spaces for playing and interacting with peers, which are essential for their well-being. The findings also confirm that well-being depends on the individual's own views of their self (Minkkinen, 2013:4), as some participants consider mingling with friends an important contributing factor to their well-being, while others consider relaxing alone as important for their well-being.

Sub-theme 3.3: Friendly and safe social environment

Participants mentioned that a friendly and safe social environment is important for their well-being, as it is nurturing, and helps to fulfil their safety and protection needs. They described a friendly environment as one that is populated with nice, caring, friendly, and welcoming people, while a safe environment is described as one with many police stations, and where people are trustworthy. This is shown by the responses below.

P4: *I like it when people in my community are nice and friendly, and the police are always there to protect me especially when I am at the park with my friends. I actually feel safe because we have a police station next to our house.*

P6: *Children must feel safe in the community, like these days people are getting kidnapped so I want the police to be all over and have many police stations so that people are safe.*

P9: *... when people around you are caring, nurturing and can talk to them about anything when I have a problem, I don't have to feel scared to approach the public today.*

Norris et al. (2008:145) exhibit views similar to those of this study's participants, in that they concur that children need supportive and safe environments that can act as protection in the face of adversity. Such environments help children to overcome adverse situations, as they actively seek and use help from the social relationships at their disposal (Barnova & Tamasova, 2018:51). Buck et al. (2018:1263) confirm that community environments that are characterised by violence threaten children's safety and sense of belonging. This is a call to enhance social well-being, which is connected

to individuals' interpersonal relationships and their feelings of security in the environment in which they live (Dunaeva, 2018:566).

Sub-theme 3.4: Bullying at school.

Bullying at school was highlighted as a factor that negatively impacts child well-being. The participants mentioned that bullies make fun of them, threaten to beat them, take their food, and try to control their lives. Bullying influences their well-being negatively as it results in primarily negative outcomes, such as unhappiness, discomfort, and fear, as shown in the below responses from the participants on this subject.

P5: *The thing that makes me unhappy is bullies at my school, they always make me uncomfortable, and they make fun of me. Other kids will be laughing at me.*

P7: *... there is a boy in my school who does not like me at all. He is always saying I will beat you and I feel like not going to school sometimes but my parents always say I must go.*

P10: *The thing is I hate people who think that they own me, or they are the boss of me... I mean some big girls in my school always ask for my lunch and they say that teachers can't do anything even if I report and I feel scared.*

According to Moore and Ramirez (2016:33), bullied children are at risk of developing mental health and emotional problems. These mental health and emotional problems could arise from the unhappiness, fear, and discomfort that children may feel as a result of being bullied. This has a significant impact on children's emotional well-being. Akram et al. (2015:177) confirm that, if a child lives in an environment that is unstable, it affects their happiness and capacity for adjustment. Bullying presents risks for children's development and affects their social performance, as well as their achievement in various spheres of life (Barnova & Gabrhelova, 2017:7). This notion is confirmed in the narratives above, as bullying affects concentration in class and has resulted in participants contemplating bunking or dropping out of school.

Sub-theme 3.5: Lack of participation and consultation in decision making.

Participants viewed their lack of participation in and consultation about matters that affect them as another factor that negatively influences their well-being. This makes

them sad, and they reported that they start to lose their sense of belonging when their parents do not involve them in decision making, such as the type of house to buy, the style of clothes to wear, choosing schools, and planning for holidays. This was reflected in the participants' responses, as listed below.

P3: *... it makes me sad when my parents choose clothes for me, they buy what I don't like even when they bought our house, I was angry because I wanted my own bedroom, but I have to share with my sister.*

P6: *I do not like it when parents just dump things on me...like they don't let me choose things for myself, they didn't let me choose my school this year and we always go to holidays of their choice, and it makes me feel left out... like I do not belong.*

P8: *.... because my parents keep messing my style and I hate it, they always buy what I do not like especially clothes, I have my own style.*

There is evidence from the established canon of literature that correlates with the views of the participants. The idea of parents making choices and decisions for children is discussed by Jamieson (2011:23), who says that children's dependency on parents and other duty bearers make them regard children as objects of protection, and not individuals with their own opinions and views which need to be respected. In connection with lack of participation, Fattore and Mason (2017:278) cited institutional barriers, like patriarchy, which place children in positions where they cannot participate in decision making. The frustrations mentioned by participants are also mentioned by Grill (2020:199), who says that giving children choices may circumvent the sentiment of being forced to do something, a sentiment which negatively impacts their well-being. For this reason, developmental social workers seek to promote the participation of vulnerable groups like children in matters that affect them, and the inclusion of their views in decision making (Patel, 2015:91).

Theme 4: Environmental factors that influence child well-being.

The participants in the study expressed that clean and healthy environments contribute positively to their well-being. They also articulated what a clean, healthy, and unclean environment looks like to them.

Sub-theme 4.1: Clean and healthy natural environment

Participants view a clean and healthy environment as one that is free from dirt, germs, and pollution. They also indicated that a clean and healthy environment helps to avoid sickness. They would like people to take responsibility for their environment. They also suggest that all rubbish bins, rivers, and other water sources must be kept clean to maintain a healthy environment, which is essential for their own well-being. The narratives below show their views.

P1: *... a clean environment with no pollution and dirty objects in rivers or water because I need to breathe clean air and that I don't get sick.*

P2: *The environment must be clean with no papers on the floor and garbage bins always clean to prevent germs.*

P4: *... I need to breathe clean air so that I don't get sick, and the streets, houses and water must be clean, people must stop littering. The air must be clean, breathable and not smelling bad and stuffy.*

P7: *The ground must be clean and have no dirt on it because we will get sick. We can keep the environment healthy by not throwing things on the floor so that we stay healthy ...like keep things clean and have hygiene.*

In alignment with the above findings, SACG (2019:164) acknowledges that South African children are exposed to air pollution from both solid and liquid fuels. This increases their likelihood of contracting diseases such as asthma. Irina and Yana (2016:182) emphasise that pollution arising from industrial development create environmental conditions that cause serious health problems which are difficult to treat and manage. Communities that are polluted and have inadequate access to water and sanitation affect children's health, as they are at risk of contracting water- and airborne diseases (Adams et al., 2019:555). UNICEF (2012:5) adds that poor sanitation and hygiene are strongly associated with increased incidences of major childhood diseases.

Theme 5: Children's contributions towards their own well-being

Participants indicated that they contribute towards their own well-being by engaging in cooking and cleaning at home, and by keeping their communities clean. The general

idea, according to the participants, is to keep themselves and others clean and healthy.

Sub-theme 5.1: Help cleaning their homes.

The findings of this study show that participants take responsibility for their own well-being. They keep themselves and their homes clean. They can take care of themselves by cooking their own meals, cleaning in and around the house, by keeping up the appearance of their homes, and by planting trees and flowers so that the air quality around them may be improved. This is indicated in the following responses from participants:

P1: *I cook my own food when I feel hungry, I do not have to wait for my mom to come back from work.... I also clean my dishes after eating.*

P3: *... cleaning and doing work around the house and eating healthy.*

P8: *...cleaning the yard and plant flowers and tree for clean air and make our house look good and beautiful all the time.*

P9: *I help my mother with laundry and cleaning our house because I want it to be clean and smart.*

These findings echo the view of AGDE (2013:1) that giving children an opportunity to attempt tasks may help them to take on bigger responsibilities in the future so that they may become competent members of society. Participants' participation in tasks around the home resonates with the findings of Martorell et al. (2014:395) that children in middle childhood gain satisfaction from completing interesting and meaningful tasks. Moreover, as the findings of this study confirm, children at this phase in their development can apply strategies for problem solving (Berk, 2013:412; Martorell et al., 2014:395).

Sub-theme 5.2: Cleaning up the community and calling on others to join them.

According to the participants' responses, it is clear that these children help to keep their community clean by placing rubbish in bins, not littering, and putting up posters to encourage others to stop littering, dumping, and to avoid pollution. It is also demonstrated that the participants do not only take responsibility for their own well-being by keeping their surroundings clean, but they also plant trees for oxygen, and

they encourage their peers to not litter and to join cleaning campaigns in the community. Their views are captured in the following narratives.

P5: *...not littering and help plant trees in the community for people to have more air to breathe.*

P6: *Clean the environment and make sure there is no pollution by putting up posters to stop smoking and pollution for the health of people in the community.*

P7: *I sometimes join the community ladies with green plastics when they pick papers around our area, especially during holidays.*

P10: *Picking litter and encourage others not to litter and make posters to stop people from dumping rubbish everywhere.*

The contributions made by the participants in their communities supports the notion that children have agency. To clarify, agency is the capacity of humans to make choices, to act, and to influence matters in their everyday lives (Sirrko et al., 2019: 286). As is evidenced by the responses above, the participants make meaningful change by demonstrating how to keep the community environment clean, and by educating others on this topic. Moreover, the ability to make judgements about cause and effect is a key developmental task during middle childhood (Henderson & Thompson, 2016:37). This is evident in the above responses, as participants can identify the causes of health problems in the community and attempt to deal with them accordingly.

Theme 6: How children's agency can be promoted to enhance their well-being

Participants expressed the desire to be consulted by their families during decision making, especially when those decisions affect them now and in the future. They also want parents to respect and consider their opinions when decisions are being made for them.

Sub-theme 6.1: Adults must involve children in decisions that concern them.

Participants claim that they know what they want in life, but that they sometimes feel that they are not being recognised as members of the family. They explained that they feel as though they are left out in most planning and decision making, such as

choosing schools and subjects, and buying clothes, and that this negatively affects their well-being. This is indicated in the responses below.

P1: *They have to tell me what they are about to do before doing it because I know what is good for me especially when they are planning something big like choosing a school for me.*

P6: *I want to be part of the planning team; I do not want to be left out because I am still part of the family and what they plan also affect my future. Sometimes it feels like they don't care about my feelings, or they don't see me, and they don't even ask if I am comfortable with their decisions.*

P8: *I am the one who knows the kind of things I want, the school, the subjects, clothes and all but they don't ask me.... but it's my life and future why don't they let me choose?*

P10: *We all must agree on one thing and not them choosing everything.*

These responses point to the need for children to exercise their agency, a need which is explained by the AGDE (2013:1) as children having a feeling that they are in control of things that happen around them. The need to be consulted correlates with children's right to participation, which is embedded in human rights provisions across a range of international treaties and domestic legislation (Viviers & Lombard, 2012:9). The responses also reveal a call for equal opportunities, which the social work profession aims to achieve, according to the ethical value of respect for equality in enhancing child well-being (NASW, 2018:2). It is also argued that, if children become capable decision-makers now, this will positively impact their long-term well-being as adults (Grill, 2020:200).

Sub-theme 6.2: Adults must respect children's opinions and choices when they make decisions.

The findings show that participants are sometimes asked for their opinions, but they are not considered during their parents' final decision-making process. The following narratives show the participants' concerns.

P3: *... my parents were supposed to respect the school that I had chosen, sometimes they ask for our opinions but do not consider them at all.... I*

could be happy with my friends at that school but sadly I am stuck at their school.

P9: *Sometimes I just feel like not saying something because what I say is not used in my family. I know the kind of things I want but they just do their own things at times especially when it comes to big things like buying a house or TV they don't care whether I am happy with it or not.*

The participants' responses confirm that the personal and subjective nature of well-being and the knowledge that children have of their lives put them in the best position to explain what well-being means to them (Fattore & Mason, 2017:276-277; Minkkinen, 2013:4). The call for children's decisions to be considered is linked to developmental social work's mandate to promote the participation and inclusion of vulnerable people, including children, in matters that affect them (Patel, 2015:91). Failure of parents to respect and consider children's opinions tallies with the findings of SCSA (2018:2) that children's participation is often seen as foreign, superficial, and alien in most African countries, as many adults feel they know what children want. Bala (2018:7) concurs saying that, even though efforts have been made to include children when making decisions about them, there are still challenges in involving them fully, and that this is due to adults' lack of trust in them and their unwillingness to fully involve them.

Summary

Chapter Four presented the empirical study and research findings. The biographical information of the participants included the participants' genders, ages, grades, number of family members in their respective households, contributors to income in their households, and sources of income. Six themes with underpinning sub-themes emerged from the findings. These themes included understanding of child well-being, contribution of significant others towards child well-being, social factors that influence child well-being, environmental factors that influence child well-being, children's contributions towards their own well-being, and suggestions on how children's agency can be promoted to enhance their well-being. The findings were indicated by the participants' responses, and subsequently interpreted and analysed by using evidence from the existing canon of literature. The next chapter presents the study's key findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

CHAPTER FIVE: KEY FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter of the research report begins by outlining the extent to which the research goal and objectives were accomplished. It also presents key findings in relation to children's perspectives regarding their own well-being for a sustainable future. Thereafter, the researcher draws conclusions from literature review, and the data that was collected from the interviews, which was presented in Chapter four. Subsequently, recommendations are offered on research outcomes and further research.

5.2 Goal and objectives

The goal of the study was to explore children's perspectives on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future within the South African context. This goal was obtained in line with the following objectives:

Objective 1

- To conceptualise child well-being and participation within the framework of ecological systems theory and sustainability.

This objective was achieved in Chapter two (see sections 2.5, 2.6, 2.9 & 2.10). Child well-being was explored in relation to social, economic, and environmental systems that affect well-being. The ecological systems theory was used as the lens that provides a comprehensive overview of child well-being whereby the focus is on "a wide array of dimensions nested in children's proximal and distal contexts that are known to be directly or indirectly influential on different dimensions of well-being" (Alaya-Nunes et al., 2018:816). It was explained in Chapter two (see sub-section 2.10) that, in the framework of ecological systems theory, the child is embedded in a series of complex and interactive systems (Louw et al., 2014:29). Child well-being and development are theorised as being founded on four concentric circles of environmental influence. Within this construction, time is a significant factor, which acknowledges both individual changes over time, and historical changes (Ben-Arieh & Fronese 2011:466). Well-being was also explored in relation to sustainability (see sub-section 2.5.1), where it was explained that the natural environment is important in promoting child well-being. This is where most caregivers in developing countries such

as South Africa derive their livelihoods (World Vision, 2013:5), and these environments must be used sustainably. This means that environmentally friendly methods must be used in efforts to promote well-being in order to preserve those resources for future generations.

It was explained in Chapter two (see sub-section 2.9) that the participation and involvement of children in their own well-being depends on the interactions between the individual and environmental factors operating at different levels. The broader systems, such as policies and legislation, were also highlighted in Chapter two (see sub-section 2.6), as they influence children's participation in promoting their own well-being. In Chapter two (see sub-section 2.9), it was asserted that a sustainable future is achieved when children are allowed to participate in matters that affect them. Children's right to participation helps to catalyse the realisation of all the rights of children and to prepare them for an active role in society (Davis, 2019:40). It was further explained in the same sub-section that giving children opportunities to make choices and attempt tasks may help them to take on bigger responsibilities in future and to become competent members of society (AGDE, 2013:1).

Objective 2

- To explore children's understanding of child well-being.

This objective was addressed in Chapter four (theme 1). Participants conceptualised well-being as experiencing emotions of happiness, as well as feeling loved and cared for, and as though their basic needs were being met. They expressed their belief that children must always be happy and enjoy life, without the presence of any stressors. They also understood well-being as the experience of being surrounded by loving and caring people and feeling satisfied with their own lives. This feeling of satisfaction included being confident that their basic human needs, such as food, health, shelter, and clothes are met. The participants equated these basic needs with human rights.

Objective 3

- To explore children's views on social factors that affect their current and future well-being.

This objective was achieved in Chapter four (see theme 3). Participants highlighted the social factors that influence child well-being. Factors that positively contribute to their well-being include interacting and relaxing with peers, a good relationship with

parents, and a pleasant and safe social environment. Factors that contribute negatively to their well-being include bad relationships with parents, bullying, and being overlooked during decision making. It was highlighted that good relationships with parents enhance well-being, while bad relationships weaken their well-being. Peer interaction and relaxation were mentioned as important contributing factors to participants' well-being. Social interactions could happen in an online setting with other children, or simply outside of the usual home setting. Participants also mentioned that a friendly and safe social environment is important for their well-being as it is nurturing and helps to fulfil their safety and protection needs. Bullying at school was noted as a factor that negatively impacts child well-being. Participants mentioned that bullies make fun of them, threaten to beat them, take their food, and try to control their lives. Bullying negatively influences child well-being, as it results in unfavourable feelings, including unhappiness, discomfort, and fear. Lack of participation and consultation was also highlighted as a factor that negatively influences their well-being. This saddens the children and causes them to feel as though they do not belong. For instance, the participants expressed frustration that their parents did not involve them when deciding on which house to buy, styles of clothes for them to wear, choosing schools, or planning for holidays.

Objective 4

- To explore children's views on economic factors that affect their current and future well-being.

This objective was achieved in Chapter four, sub-theme 1.3, where participants mentioned that, to them, well-being means fulfilment of basic needs. This implies that parents and care givers must have the money to provide these basic needs. The objective was also fulfilled in sub-theme 3.1, where participants mentioned that their well-being is enhanced when parents take them shopping and spoil them, activities which also require money. Economic factors were also explored in relation to the existing literature on this topic. In Chapter two (see sub-section 2.5.2), it was reported that studies show that being born into a poor family significantly affects all spheres of the child's life, and that they have less opportunities to develop their capacities as compared to children that are raised in more prosperous families (Müderrisoğlu et al., 2013:22). Chaudry and Wimer (2016:23) point out that poverty and low income are causally related to poor child development. Therefore, growing up in a poor household

is likely to compromise a child's living conditions and access to services, giving rise to various forms of deprivation and social exclusion that may lead to poverty traps which are difficult to escape (SACG, 2020:37), thereby hindering their pathway to a sustainable future.

Objective 5

- To explore children's views on environmental factors that affect their current and future well-being.

Objective 5 was achieved in Chapter four (see sub-theme 3.3), where participants noted that a friendly and safe social environment is important for their well-being, as these environments are nurturing, and help to fulfil their safety and protection needs. They described a friendly environment as one that is populated with nice, caring, friendly, and welcoming people, while a safe environment was described as one with many police stations, and where people are trustworthy (see sub-theme 3.3). The participants also highlighted that the physical environment must be clean for them to live well (see theme 4). They articulated what a clean and healthy environment looks like compared to an unclean and dirty one. In their view, a clean and healthy environment is one that is free from dirt, germs, and pollution. They emphasised that the community must take responsibility for their environment by emptying all rubbish bins and keeping rivers and other water sources clean. According to the participants, these actions should be done in order to maintain a healthy environment, which is essential for their own well-being.

Objective 6

- To describe the children's suggestions for enhancing child participation in matters that influence their well-being.

This objective was achieved in Chapter four (theme 6), where participants expressed the need to be consulted by their families in making decisions, especially those that affect them now and in the future. They suggested that parents must respect and consider their opinions when making decisions for them. Participants claimed that they know what they want in life, but that they sometimes feel that they are not being recognised as members of the family, as they are left out in most planning and decision making. For example, the children felt that their opinions were not considered in decisions related to choosing schools and subjects, and buying clothes, and that this

negatively affects their well-being. The findings also show that participants are occasionally asked for their opinions, but that their views are not considered when the final decision is made by their parents. Thus, they suggest that their voices be heard and considered during decision making.

5.3 Key findings and conclusions

This section presents the study's key findings as well as the conclusions that can be drawn from them.

- The findings show that individual children know exactly what well-being means to them. These meanings vary from one child to the next, as this is a concept that is influenced by personal feelings, experiences, taste, and opinions.
- It can be concluded that well-being is subjective, and the meaning of child well-being is influenced by each child's own views and experiences. This study demonstrates the importance of taking children's perspectives on their well-being into consideration in attempts to promote child well-being, as this helps create a pathway for sustainable futures.
- The findings show that environmental and socio-economic factors can either influence a child's well-being positively (protective factors) or negatively (risk factors).
- The researcher concludes that, in the promotion of child well-being, there are factors that help facilitate the process and there are also those that act as stumbling blocks. These obstacles and helpful factors need to be taken into consideration in shaping a sustainable future for children.
- The findings show that parents, peers, and schoolteachers play an important role in children's well-being.
- It can be concluded that a child's significant others influence and contribute immensely to their well-being, and that developing positive relations is an important pathway to a sustainable future for children.
- The literature on this subject reveal that the existing social and economic inequalities in South Africa directly impact adults' and children's exercise of agency. The findings in this study show that some children still have little or no access to proper sanitation. For example, some children still use pit latrines and bucket toilet systems, which pose risks to children's health as they are associated with diseases such as cholera and typhoid.

- It can be concluded that many children in South Africa are still living in conditions wherein their basic needs are not met. This negatively influences attempts to promote child well-being for sustainable futures.
- The findings point to a lack of participation by children in matters that concern their well-being and everyday lives. In instances where they are consulted, their opinions are not taken seriously or considered in the final decisions. This is problematic, as their participation rights are hindered. This detracts from the promotion of their well-being, as their voices are important in creating a future that is free from social ills.
- The researcher can conclude that not involving children in decisions related to their own well-being is a serious challenge that negatively affects children's well-being and blocks pathways to a sustainable future.
- The findings show that most decisions in the lives of children are made by adults on their behalf. Furthermore, when children are asked their views, they are not always listened to when decisions are made. Most decisions in their lives are made by adults on their behalf. This leaves little room for them to make choices and decisions that contribute to their own well-being, since they are seen as objects of protection, which, consequently, silence their voices.
- It can be concluded that many children are not practicing their agency despite knowing exactly what they want, and how and where they can be involved in making decisions that affect their well-being.
- The findings show that children are responsible beings who contribute meaningfully towards their own well-being and are influential in their own homes and communities.
- It can be concluded that children demonstrate significant abilities as capable citizens who can take on responsibilities and active roles in their communities. It then follows that children's voices on child well-being should be considered in attempts to create a pathway to sustainable futures.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the researcher makes recommendations on the following themes to promote child well-being for sustainable futures.

5.4.1 The subjective nature of well-being

Due to the subjective nature of well-being, social workers, caregivers, policy makers, and other stakeholders must prioritise the meanings that children attach to their own well-being, as this can be helpful in developing responsive intervention programmes that promote and enhance child well-being.

5.4.2 Development of protective factors that promote child well-being.

Social workers, parents, and caregivers must invest in children's abilities to reduce risks and increase protective factors by involving them in activities such as capacity building, education, awareness creation programmes, and services that mitigate risks and promote children's well-being. They must also equip them with the relevant knowledge and skills so that they can make informed decisions on issues pertaining to their own well-being.

5.4.3 Dealing with risk factors that hinder the promotion of child well-being.

Social workers and other stakeholders must involve children in defining what they perceive to be risk factors. Children should then be given the opportunity to help identify strategies that lessen the effects of risk factors on the physical, mental, and spiritual development of the child.

5.4.4 The contribution of significant others to child well-being

The researcher recommends that social workers and other stakeholders consider the child's various social interactions and efforts to build positive relationships. These positive interpersonal relationships are essential for children's well-being. Social workers must examine the extent to which children's significant others such as parents, caregivers, and schoolteachers allow them to participate in decisions that affect their own well-being. It is also important to explore ways in which children's agency can be fostered and nurtured in these different interactions, as this is central in creating a pathway to sustainable futures.

5.4.5 The status of children in South Africa

Given that existing social and economic inequalities in the country directly impact children's exercise of agency and their sense of participation in society, it is recommended that children be genuinely consulted in legislative and policy making

processes. It is also recommended that child-informed intervention programmes be implemented in promoting their well-being.

5.4.6 Strategies to promote children's participation.

In most instances, children's participation is not taken seriously. These perceptions often create barriers which prevent the full implementation of children's participation rights. For this reason, the researcher recommends that opportunities be created for children to experience meaningful participation, and for their opinions and perspectives to be integrated into decision making processes. If children are actively involved and their perspectives on child well-being are identified and incorporated into development and intervention plans, pathways to sustainable futures may be created more successfully.

5.4.7 The promotion of children's agency

Seeing that children possess knowledge of what they want for their own well-being and that there are obstructions to the full promotion of their agency, the researcher recommends that the international, regional, and national legislative frameworks which give children participation rights be fully considered when working with children. It is therefore important that policies and legislation must aim to remove barriers that stand in the way of promoting children's agency, so that their voices and opinions may be considered in decision making.

5.4.8 Further research

Even though the research was limited to a specific age group and location in South Africa, the study can be extended to different age groups and other parts of the country. In addition, children from different ethnic groups and socio-economic backgrounds could also be interviewed, in order to broaden our knowledge of child well-being and how children perceive their own well-being. Further research could then focus on developing child well-being indicators that are informed by the perspectives of children, which can be used to monitor the status of children in South Africa.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule & Pictures

Interview Schedule

Thank you that you are willing to take part in this study. As I mentioned earlier, I am interested to get your views on what is important for children's well-being, therefore for them to be happy, healthy, and successful in life. I would like to ask you a few questions. Please take your time to think about the question and your answer. There are no right or wrong answers as all information is important to me. We will also make use of pictures when we talk about things that you may see as important for child well-being.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. How old are you?

8	9	10	11	12
---	---	----	----	----

2. How do you describe your gender?

GENDER	
Male	
Female	
Other (that you may want to choose)	
Prefer not to say	

3. In what school grade are you? Grade

4. How many people live in your household? (e.g. parents, siblings, extended family such as grandparents, uncles/aunts, nieces/nephews) Number: Adults: Children:
Please tell me about them.

5. Who brings in money in your household?

(childcare grant; old age grant; formal / informal jobs)

Rephrased: who makes money in the household, for example money to pay for food, rent and school fees?

SECTION B: QUESTIONS ON CHILD WELL-BEING

1. How will you know if it is going well with a child?

(e.g. emotions, health, physical wellness, positive development, doing well at school, care by parents)

2. Who (which people) should be in a child's life for a child to live well?

(e.g. family, parents, grandparents, extended family, siblings, teachers, friends, pets ...)

What must they be like?

3. What must children have for them to live well?

(a home, family income, parental work, money, clothing, food, pocket money, TV, cell phone, internet access, transport, safety ...)

4. What places and services in their community will help children to live well?

(house, school, clinic, hospital, park, church ...)

5. What must children's environment look like for them to live well?

(clean water, clean air, green spaces, clean environment ...)
















6. What can children do in their homes, in their community and for the environment to improve their own well-being?

7. How can adults involve children in their plans and programmes to improve children's well-being?

I would like you to look at some pictures about child well-being. We have already talked about information for some of the pictures, but please see whether there something in the pictures that you would like to add to what we already discussed.

Thank you for sharing your views with me. It is important that we engage children as it will help us to plan programmes and services that will improve the well-being of many children in South Africa.

Picture 1: Definition of Well-being





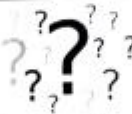






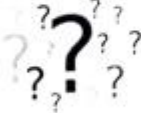

WHAT IS WELL-BEING?		
 Happy	 Healthy	 Successful
 Loved	 Cared for	 Anything else that you can think of?
WHO MUST BE IN CHILDREN'S LIVES FOR THEM TO LIVE WELL?		
 Family	 Father and mother	 Brothers and sisters
 Grandfather, grandmother	 Uncles and aunts	 Friends
 Teacher	 Pets	 Anyone else that you can think of?

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Picture 2: Children's Needs

WHAT MUST CHILDREN HAVE TO LIVE WELL?		
 House	 School	 Clinic/hospital
 Church	 Park	 Shop
 Food	 Clothes	 Books
 Electricity	 Water	 Sanitation / toilets
 Transport	 Television	 Cell phone, laptop
<small>The images are available on the open platform Online Pictures, and licensed under CC BY-SA-NC</small>		

Picture 3: Children's Environment

 <p>Safety</p>	 <p>Sport</p>	 <p>School uniforms and shoes</p>
 <p>Fire station</p>	 <p>Anything else that you can think of?</p>	
<p>WHAT MUST THE WORLD/ENVIRONMENT LOOK LIKE FOR CHILDREN TO LIVE WELL?</p>		
 <p>Clean neighbourhood</p>	 <p>Clean water</p>	 <p>Clean air</p>
 <p>No pollution</p>	 <p>Forests; clean rivers and oceans</p>	 <p>People who keep their neighbourhood clean</p>
 <p>Anything else that you can think of?</p>		 <p>Thank you!</p>
<p>The images are available on the open platform Online Pictures, and licensed under CC BY-SA-NC</p>		

Appendix B: Ethics approval letter



Faculty of Humanities
Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Lefapha la Bomotheo



14 September 2021

Dear Mrs B Majuru

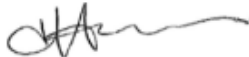
Project Title:	Children's perspectives on child well-being: A pathway to sustainable futures
Researcher:	Mrs B Majuru
Supervisor(s):	Prof A Lombard
Department:	Social Work and Criminology
Reference number:	17384045 (HUM007/0821)
Degree:	Masters

I have pleasure in informing you that the above application was **approved** by the Research Ethics Committee on 26 August 2021. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely,



Prof Karen Harris
Chair: Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: tracey.andrew@up.ac.za

Research Ethics Committee Members: Prof KL Harris (Chair), Mr A Bizos, Dr A-M de Beer, Dr A dos Santos, Dr P Guturs, Ms KT Govinder Andrew, Dr E Johnson, Dr D Krige, Prof D Maree, Mr A Mohamed, Dr I Noomé, Dr J Okeke, Dr C Puttergill, Prof D Reyburn, Prof M Soer, Prof E Taljard, Ms D Mokalapa

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Appendix C: Informed assent form



Researcher: Beauty Majuru (17384045)
Degree: Social Development & Policy
Contact details: 797334253

PARTICIPANT'S INFORMED ASSENT FORM

Dear participant 

My name is Beauty Majuru and I am doing research at the University of Pretoria on how children understand child well-being. With child well-being, I mean a life that enables children to grow up happy and healthy and make a success in life. Research is a study to find new information about something, and I am known as the researcher. For this study, I will talk to children about how they understand the well-being of children and will ask them questions about things they think can help children to live a good life, now and in the future. The title of my study is as follows: *Children's perspectives on child well-being: A pathway to sustainable futures.*

The reason for the study

Children's well-being is important for them to grow up to live a good life. There have been research studies on this topic, but there are not enough studies to find out what children's own views on their well-being are. Information from children themselves can help social workers to develop plans that will best be able to support children's well-being.

What will you be asked to do?

If you agree to take part in the study, you will be a research participant and I, the researcher, will talk to you about your ideas about things that can help with children's well-being. We will

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talk for about 45 to 60 minutes. I will make a voice recording, if it is fine with you, to remember all the information that you share. All the information will be handled confidentially, meaning that no one but I will know what you said in our discussion.

You do not have to answer a question or questions if you do not want to. You can also stop taking part in the study at any time, if you wish. No one will be upset with you if you do not answer a question or if you decide to stop taking part in the study.

To stay safe, we will follow the following rules for COVID-19 during the discussion:

- We will both wear face masks that cover our mouths and noses at all times
- We will disinfect our hands when we meet and during the discussion, if needed
- We will keep a distance of 1.5 to 2 meters between us
- We will have the discussion outside or in a room with an open window or door, with no other persons close to us
- We will not share any materials and the researcher will provide you with a pencil, paper and set of communication pictures.

Your rights during the study



Your parents will know that you will take part in the study because they had to give their permission. They will also know that it is important that you yourself decide if you want to join in the study or not. Please say it clearly if you do not want to take part in the study or if you want to stop taking part in the study at a later time. No one will be upset with you if you do.

You will not get any money or gifts for taking part in the study. But the information that you give can help social workers to develop programmes that will benefit children in South Africa.

All the information will be handled with strict confidentiality, meaning that only I, the researcher, will know what you said during the discussion. My teacher at the University will also look at the information. Your name will not be known to anyone and will not be mentioned in the report that I will write about the study. Your information will be safely stored at the University of Pretoria for 15 years. If the information will be used later for other studies, it will still be confidential.

If you become upset because of taking part in the discussion, you can tell me or your parents. I will ask a social worker or psychologist to talk to you to help you feel better.

What if you have questions?

If you have any questions, you can contact me, the researcher, at cell number 797334253 or send me an email at beautymajuru@gmail.com. You will also get a chance to ask me questions about the study before our discussion as well as at the end of our discussion.

My decision

After reading through this letter together with the researcher and having the opportunity to ask questions that I had about the study, I decided the following:

Yes, I would like to join the study.



No, I would not like to join the study.



Because I chose to join the study, I write my name and today's date below to show that I decided to take part in the study. The researcher gave me a copy of this letter.

Name of participant

Date

Name of researcher

Date

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Lefapha la Bomo

Appendix D: Informed consent form



Researcher: Beauty Majuru (17384045)
Degree: Social Development & Policy
Contact details: 797334253

INFORMED CONSENT BY PARENT/GUARDIAN

1. Title of the study

Children's perspectives on child well-being: A pathway to sustainable futures.

2. Goal of the study

The goal of the study is to explore and describe children's perceptions on their well-being as a pathway to a sustainable future. In doing so the researcher will gain information on children's understanding of child well-being; thus, what makes children to be happy, healthy and successful in life. The well-being of children has a significant influence on their lives and on their future. Limited South African studies have been conducted on children's own perspectives on the topic, with the result that interventions to enhance children's well-being are mostly based on the views of adults. Listening to children's voices on the topic can assist social workers and other professionals to develop suitable interventions that will support the well-being and positive development of children in South Africa, at present and in the future.

3. Procedures

Your child will be requested to take part in a personal interview with the researcher, in which they will talk about your child's views on factors that can contribute to the well-being of children. The interview is expected to last about 45 to 60 minutes and the researcher will audio-record the interview to make sure that he/she captures information correctly. All the information will be handled confidentially. Your child's real name will not be used, and his/her identity will not be made known in the researcher's report.

COVID-19 guidelines for interpersonal contact will be followed during the interview. The researcher and your child will both adhere to the following guidelines during the interview:

- Wearing protective face masks that cover their mouths and noses at all times
- Disinfecting their hands with a suitable disinfectant when they meet and during the interview, as needed

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- Keeping the required personal distance of 2 meters between them
- The interview will be conducted outside or in a room with an open window or door, with no other persons in the immediate environment
- No writing materials, communication pictures or other objects will be shared, and your child will be provided with a pencil, paper and set of communication pictures.

4. Possible risks

The interview with your child will focus on his/her views of factors that can enhance child well-being in general, and not on his/her personal experiences related to the topic. Therefore, there are no risks foreseen in terms of your child's participation in the study. If your child, however, experiences emotional distress because of his/her participation in the interview, he/she will be referred for telephonic counselling free of charge with a suitably qualified professional person such as a social worker or psychologist.

5. Benefits of participation

Your child will not receive any payment or gifts for taking part in the study. However, participation in the study can provide a meaningful experience for him/her to help social workers to develop interventions that can support the well-being and positive development of children in South Africa.

6. Rights as a participant

I am aware that participation in the study is voluntary and that my child must not feel under any obligation to take part in the study. I understand that my child will have the right not to answer any question or questions that make him/her feel uncomfortable and that he/she can withdraw from the study at any time without having to explain why. In both instances, there will be no negative consequences for your child and the researcher will respect his/her decision.

7. Confidentiality

The researcher will type out the audio-recording of the interview. The recording and the typed document will be handled with strict confidentiality and will be safely stored by the researcher. Only the researcher and her supervisor at the University will have access to this information. After completion of the research, all the documents will be safely stored according to the guidelines of the Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria. If your child decides to withdraw from the study, his/her information will be destroyed.

The researcher will write a report on the study. Your child's name or personal details will not appear in the report. Your child can ask the researcher to get access to the information that he/she provided during the interview, if he/she wishes.

I am aware that the information provided by my child will be stored for 15 years in the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, as stipulated in policy.

9. Data usage

The findings of this study will be used in a research report and possibly for professional publications and conference papers. The findings may also be used for further research. If used for further research, the information will still be regarded as confidential, as described above.

10. Contact details

If I need more information about this research, I can contact the researcher at her e-mail at beautymajuru@gmail.com or on his/her cell number as provided above.

11. Permission for participation in the research study

I, the undersigned, understand the information provided above. I understand what the research is about and why it is being done. I had the opportunity to ask the researcher questions about the study and all my questions have been answered satisfactorily.

I understand my rights as a parent/guardian of a child participant, as well as my child's rights as a participant in the study. I give my permission that my child can voluntarily participate in the research study. I have received a copy of this letter.

Parent/guardian: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____